

7



SHOULDER-A-COFFIN
KURO

SATOKO KIYUDUKI



*The traveler thought,
"This is how my journey ends."*

Shoulder-a-Coffin Kuro

CHARACTERS

Sen:
A human
transformed
into a bat.
Kuro's
partner.

Kuro:
On a journey in search
of a way to break the
black magic spell put
on her by a witch.

Nijuku and Sanju:
Twin artificial humans
traveling to learn about the
"outside world."

ADMIT ONE
\$2.50

TICKET
\$2.50













What, are we out of fuel?

HUH?

I FEEL LIKE THE LANTERN'S FLAMES ARE GETTING WEAKER BY THE MINUTE...



WE WON'T BE ABLE TO FIND SHINIES LIKE THIS.

IT'S ALL DARK HERE.



HOW ODD... I THOUGHT WE STILL HAD A LITTLE LEFT.

THAT WAS YOUR IDEA, WASN'T IT?

Y'know, I'm sure it's from us heating the fluorite back there.

That was a waste of fuel.



NOW WHAT?

MY SPARKLIES HAVE GONE OUT.



I've told you before! Don't treat me like a bat when it suits you!

I'm human on the inside, so I'm really delicate with that stuff.

SEN, CAN'T YOU GET A FEEL FOR THE LAYOUT OF THIS CAVE FROM HERE?

USING ULTRA-SONIC WAVES OR WHAT-EVER...



...HOW DID WE MAKE THEM GLOW?

BUT... BUT...

I KNOW!

WE'LL LIGHT THE SPARKLIES WE PICKED UP.



OH... ALL NIGHT, HUH...?

WHY, even last night! The humid, damp rock wall chilled me to the bone, so I was up all night with the lantern lit for warmth.

I WANT FUR ON MY WINGS.



...TO HIGH HEAT OR LIGHT...


YOU SEE, PIECES OF FLUORITE...

...GLOW LIKE THIS WHEN EXPOSED



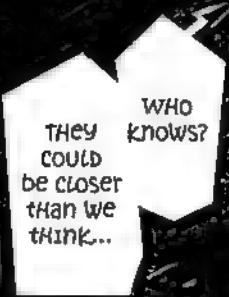
WHY
DON'T
WE TRY
CALLING
OUT TO
THEM?

NEVER
MIND FINDING
THOSE TWO.
MAKING OUR
OWN WAY
BACK IS UP
IN THE AIR
NOW.



ALL RIGHT.
LET'S TURN IT
OFF BEFORE THE
FUEL RUNS OUT
COMPLETELY.

NO
GOOD.
LOOKS
LIKE IT'S
ABOUT
TO GO
OUT.



THEY
COULD
BE CLOSER
THAN WE
THINK...

WHO
KNOWS?

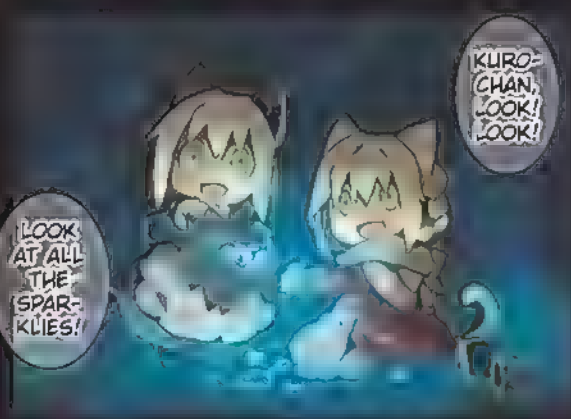
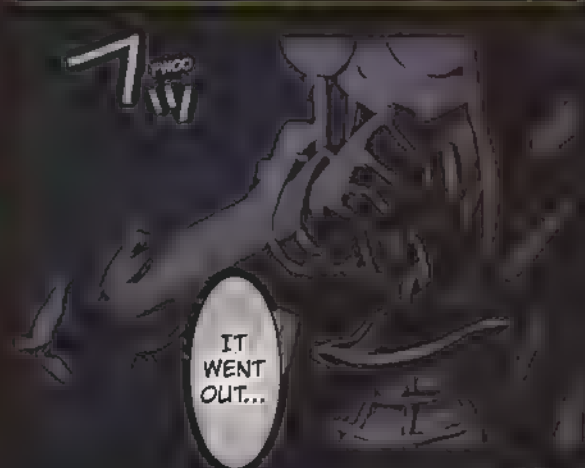
DO YOU
THINK
THEY'RE
WITHIN
HEARING
RANGE?



MAYBE
ONCE
OUR EYES
ADJUST...

SHOOT. NOW
I CAN'T SEE
ANYTHING.

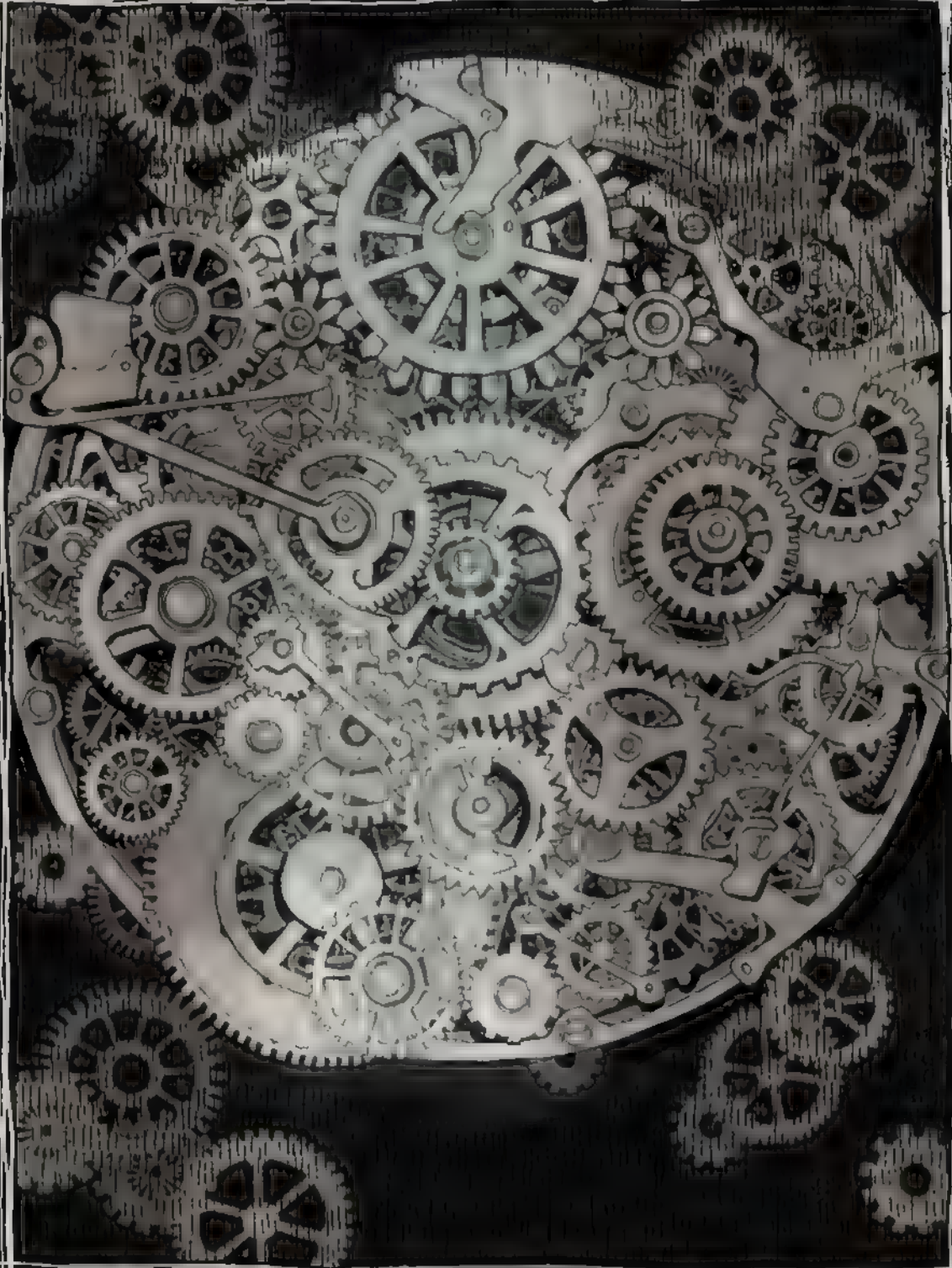






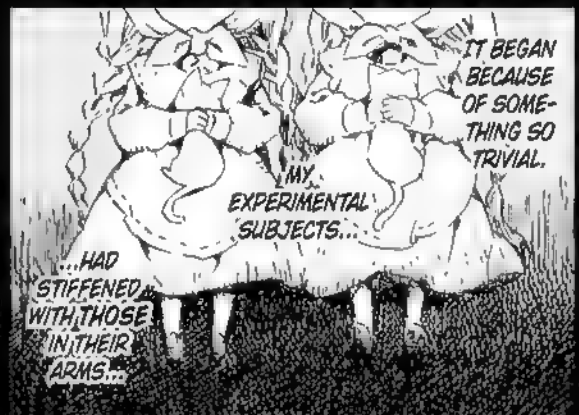






Shall we try reversing the gears?
One's story becomes another's story.
So whose tale is this, and who is the witness?

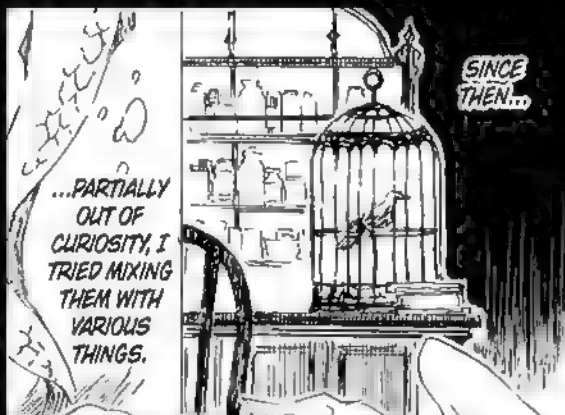






...IN AN
ALCHEMIST'S
LAB.

I SUPPOSE
THEY WERE
LIKE THE
PHILOSOPHER'S
STONE...



SINCE
THEN...

...PARTIALLY
OUT OF
CURIOSITY, I
TRIED MIXING
THEM WITH
VARIOUS
THINGS.



THEIR
EXISTENCE
WAS
MIRACULOUS
AS WELL AS
CHARMING.

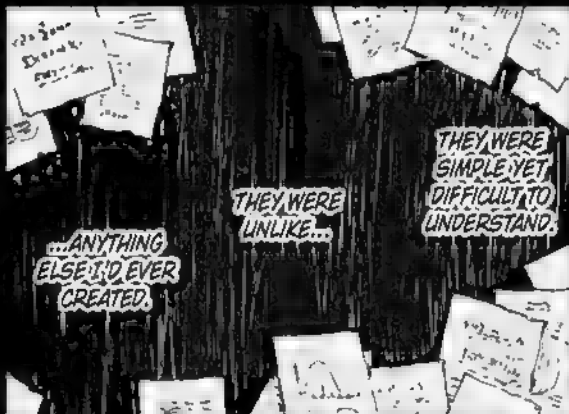
I WOULD GET
REACTIONS
THAT WENT
BEYOND
LOGIC AND
COMMON
SENSE.



"ODDLY,
ENOUGH..."

...THOSE TWO
ASSIMILATED,
RETAINING
THEIR SELVES.

...WHATEVER
I COMBINED
THEM WITH...



...ANYTHING
ELSE I'D EVER
CREATED.

THEY WERE
UNLIKE...

THEY WERE
SIMPLE YET
DIFFICULT TO
UNDERSTAND.



...THEY
WOULD SPIT
THEM OUT
LATER.

IF
THERE
WERE
THINGS
THEY
DID NOT
LIKE...

BUT THE
REVERSE
ALSO HELD
TRUE.



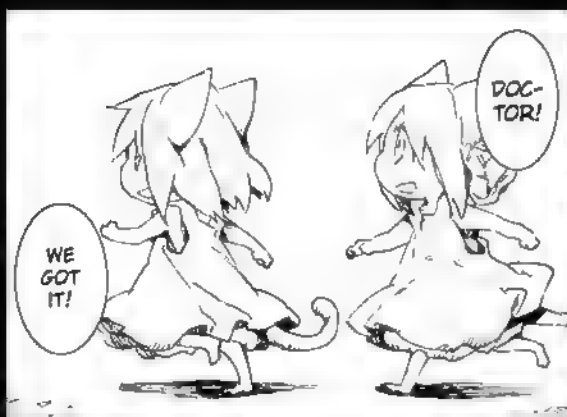
...SOMETHING
WHITE.

AT LAST,
I HAD
OBTAINED
SOMETHING
THAT WAS
NOT GRAY...



...THEY EVEN
DETACHED
THEIR OWN
SHADOWS.

AT SOME
POINT...







I SUPPOSE
MY ONE
AND ONLY
SUCCESS...

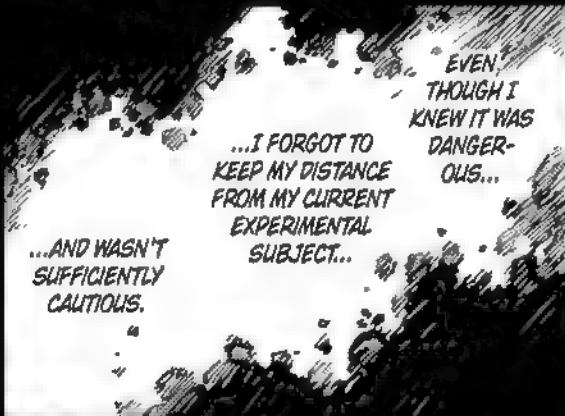
...CLOUDED
MY MIND.



WHAT
ARE WE
GOING
TO DO
TODAY?

DOC-
TOR!

DOC-
TOR!



...I FORGOT TO
KEEP MY DISTANCE
FROM MY CURRENT
EXPERIMENTAL
SUBJECT...

...AND WASN'T
SUFFICIENTLY
CAUTIOUS.

EVEN,
THOUGH I
KNEW IT WAS
DANGER-
OUS...



THE
TRUTH
IS...

OR
RATHER,
I DID
REALIZE
IT.

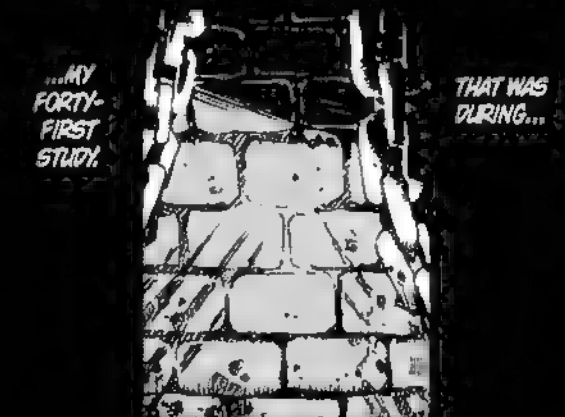
...I
SHOULD'VE
REALIZED IT
SOMEWHERE
ALONG THE
LINE.

I SHOULD
HAVE
ACCEPTED
IT.



THEY WERE
BROUGHT FORTH
BY CHANCE AND
SOME OTHER
PRIMARY
FACTORS.

I'M NOT
THE ONE
WHO
CREATED
THEM.



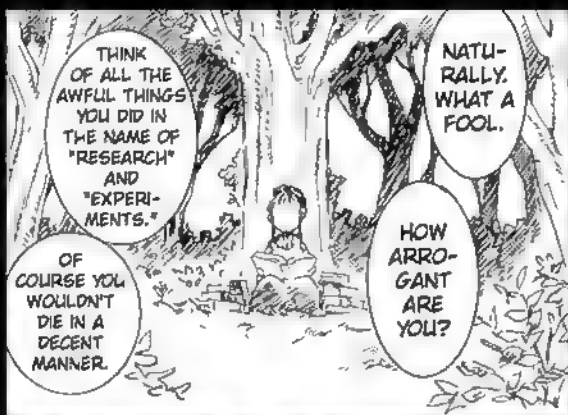
...MY
FORTY-
FIRST
STUDY.

THAT WAS
DURING...



...ALL MY
EXPERI-
MENTS
WERE
FAILURES,
AND I
COULDN'T
PROCLAIM
OTHER-
WISE.

TO BE
HONEST,
AFTER
THOSE
TWO...





AND...

...AS
I WAS
ABLE TO,
IN A
MANNER OF
SPEAKING.

...I HOPE
THEY CAN
STAY AS
THEY ARE
SOMEWHERE
IN THIS
WORLD...

EVEN
WITHOUT ME
AROUND...

AS WITH
MOST
THINGS,
WHERE
THERE'S
A WILL,
THERE'S
A WAY.

...I'M SURE
THOSE TWO
WILL BE ABLE
TO MAKE IT
SOMEHOW.



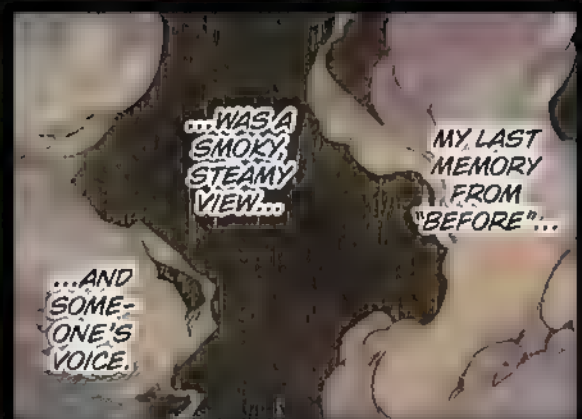
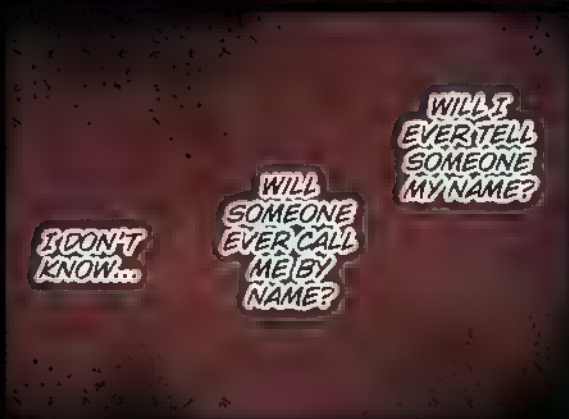
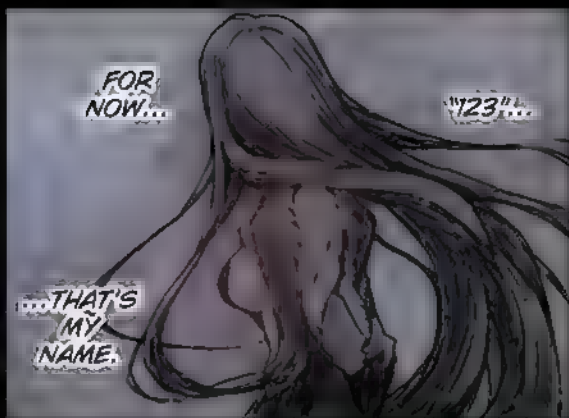
YES,
IN
SHORT...

...I SUPPOSE
ALL I CAN SAY
IS THEY ARE
MY "HOPE."

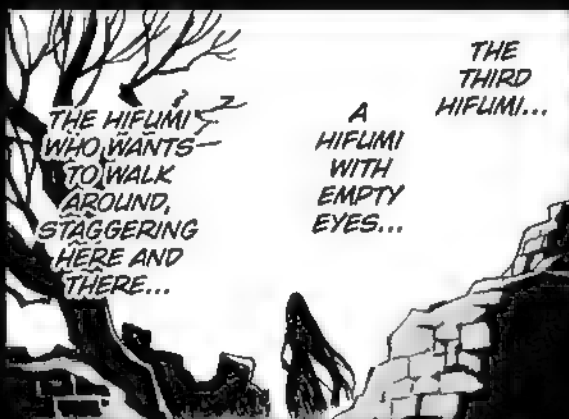
I WANT
THEM...

...TO FIND
A REASON
TO LIVE...

...IN THIS
WORLD.







THE HIFUMI
WHO WANTS—
TO WALK
AROUND,
STAGGERING
HERE AND
THERE...

A
HIFUMI
WITH
EMPTY
EYES...

THE
THIRD
HIFUMI...



MY
BODY...

THIS
PATCH-
WORK
BODY...



...WHO
DESPISES
MEN...

THE
QUIET
HIFUMI...

THE
SECOND
HIFUMI...



...MADE OF
THE SKINS
OF THREE
PEOPLE...

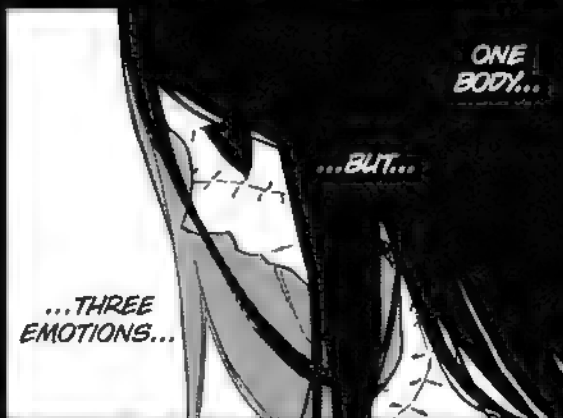
ONE
"CONTAINER"
...



...BUT
ALSO
SEEMS TO
BECOME
SOMEONE
ELSE FROM
TIME TO
TIME...

THE
FIRST
HIFUMI...

THE KIND
HIFUMI WHO
LIKES TO
TALK TO
PEOPLE...



ONE
BODY...

...BUT...

...THREE
EMOTIONS...



... "SOMETHING"
CAN ALWAYS BE
SEEN LURKING IN
THE SHADOWS.

AND
DURING
THOSE
TIMES...



JUST LIKE
THE SCARS
FROM OUR
CLUMSY
STITCHES...

...LITTLE
BY LITTLE,
WE CAME TO
OVERLAP...

...AND
BECAME
"HIFUMI."



...I
CAN'T
DO IN
THIS
BODY.

HOWEVER,
THERE
IS ONE
THING...



MY
STRANGE
BODY...

MY...

...NEW
BODY...

...CAN
USE
MAGIC.



...
REJECTS
IT.

I KNOW
THAT THIS
BODY—
HIFUMI—



...AND
I CAN DO
ANYTHING.

I CAN
GO ANY-
WHERE...



WHEN
I...



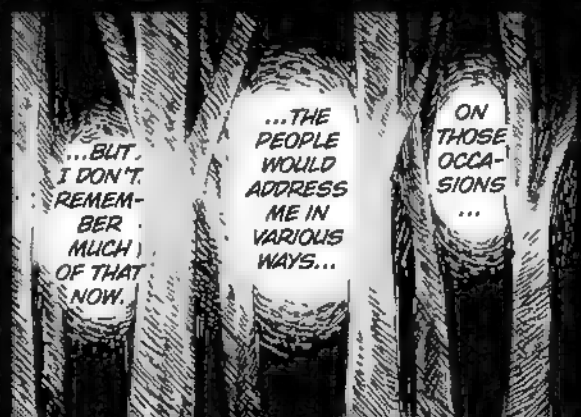
...I
SOMETIMES
MADE THEM
COME
TRUE.

WHEN
PEOPLE
CAME TO
ME WITH
THEIR
WISHES...



...MY
PREVIOUS
LIFE...

...TRIED
TO
RECALL
...



...BUT,
I DON'T
REMEM-
BER
MUCH
OF THAT
NOW.

...THE
PEOPLE
WOULD
ADDRESS
ME IN
VARIOUS
WAYS...

ON
THOSE
OCCA-
SIONS
...



THE
DARK-
NESS...

IT'S
GROWING

...IS
PERVA-
SIVE.

I
PROBABLY

...WON'T
BE ABLE
TO BREAK
FREE OF
IT NOW.



...IF
I COULD
JUST FIND
WHAT'S
ALWAYS
BEEN
THERE...

EVEN
SO, AT
LEAST...

...THAT
FRAGMENT
FROM WHEN
I WAS ME...



...WHAT
I'M
LOOKING
FOR BUT
CAN'T
RECALL...

IF I
COULD
FIND...



"I AM HOLDING
ON TO ALL OF
YOUR DEATHS."

...SOME-
ONE
FROM
BEYOND
SAID...

THAT'S
WHY OUR
"BODY"
DOESN'T
DIE.



MY
DEATH...

...IS
PROOF I
LIVED.



INSTEAD,
INSIDE OF
ME...

BUT
OUR BODY
KNOWS NO
DEATH.



...THERE
IS...

...ONLY
DARK-
NESS.

PROFOUND
DARK-
NESS...



...DON'T
CRY.

PLEASE...



WHEN IS
SHE GOING
TO COME
HOME?

WHERE'S
MOMMY?



...IT
BREAKS
MY
HEART.

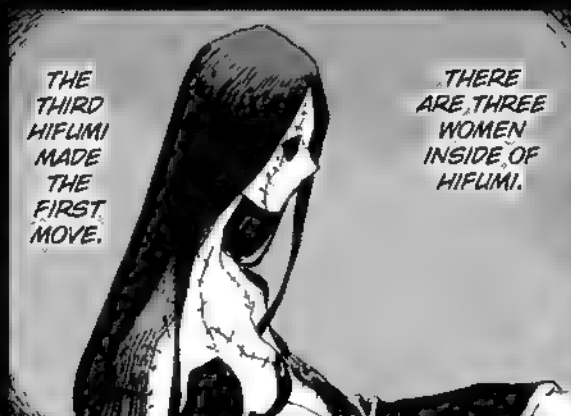
WHEN
I LOOK
AT THE
SADNESS
IN YOUR
FACE...



YOU'RE
ALWAYS
GETTING
UPSET.

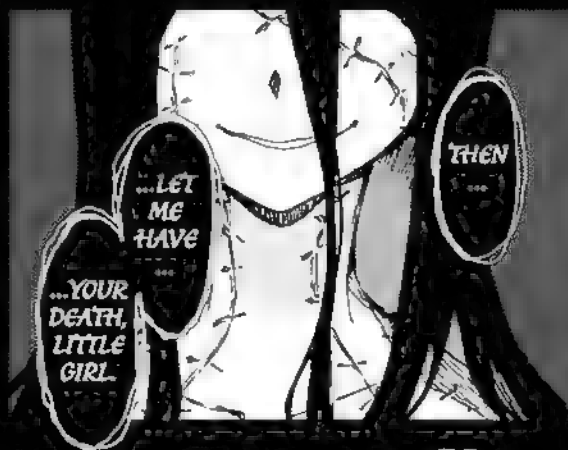
AHHH,
AGAIN...

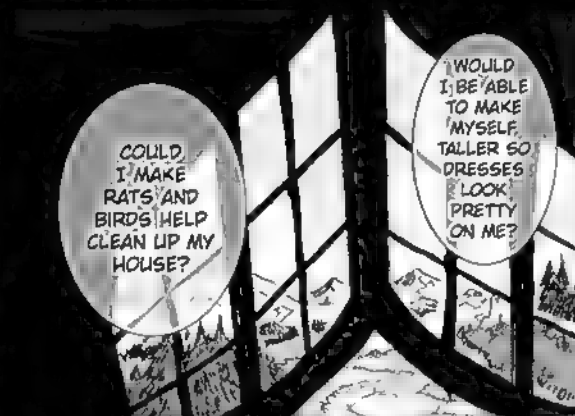


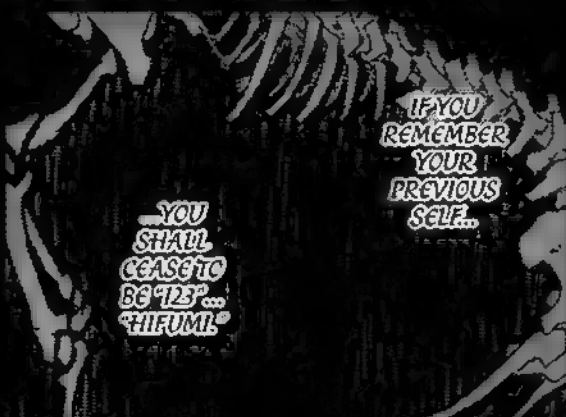
















I AM HIFUMI.
I AM HIFUMI.
I AM HIFUMI.
A WOMAN
WITH A
PATCHWORK
BODY...
...AND I'VE
FINALLY
REALIZED
SOMETHING.

MY
BODY...
MY
STRINGS...
...SYMBOLIZE
ME.
...HAS
BEEN
SEWN
UP.

...ARE
CONNECTED
TO THE
PERSON
CON-
TROLLING ME.
THE
OTHER
ENDS OF
THESE
STRINGS

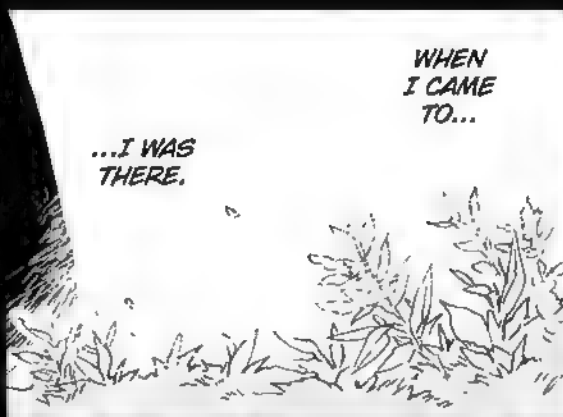
...ME...
...FROM
THAT
HEIGHT?
WHO...
...IS
MANIPU-
LATING...

I HAVE
NO CHOICE,
REALLY,
SINCE THIS
IS THE
ONLY
MODEL.
THIS
SHOULD'VE
NEVER
BEEN PUT
TOGETHER
WITH ODDS
AND ENDS
FROM THAT
PLACE.
COME
TO
THINK
OF
IT...
...I
KNEW THIS
WOMAN HAD
A TENDENCY
TO APPROACH
ORPHAN
GIRLS...
ONCE
MORE...
...BUT IF I'D
REALIZED
WHAT A
PAIN IT WAS
TO KEEP THE
"HEART"...
...I NEVER
WOULD'VE
LISTENED
TO HER.
CLOSE
IT UP...
SEW IT
UP...
WHO
ARE
YOU?
NOW
THEN,
ONE
MORE
TIME...



...I
CONTINUED
TO WANDER.

AND
SO...



...I WAS
THERE.

WHEN
I CAME
TO...



ONE
PERSON...

...WITHIN ME
MUTTERED...

...
LOOKING
FOR
SOME-
THING?

WAS
I...



I
HAVE A
FEELING

...THERE
WAS SOME
IMPORTANT
MEMORY
FROM
MY OLD
SELF.

THAT'S
WHO I AM
NOW.

HIFUMI.



SOMEONE
WITHIN
ME...

...ANSWERED...

A
VESSEL



...BUT
THEN I
FORGOT
IT AGAIN.

I
ALMOST
HAD
IT...

I
CAN'T
REMEM-
BER IT.

BUT...



FOR
YOU
AND
ME.

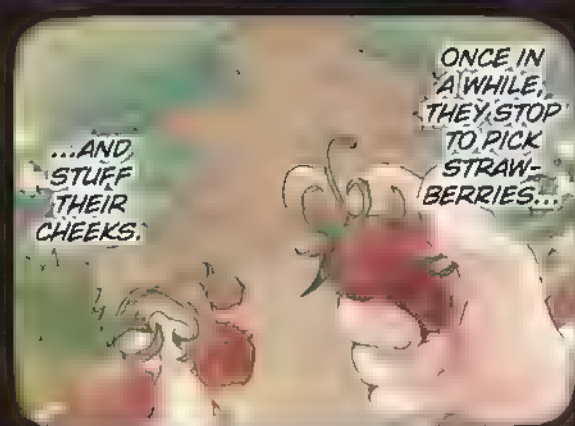
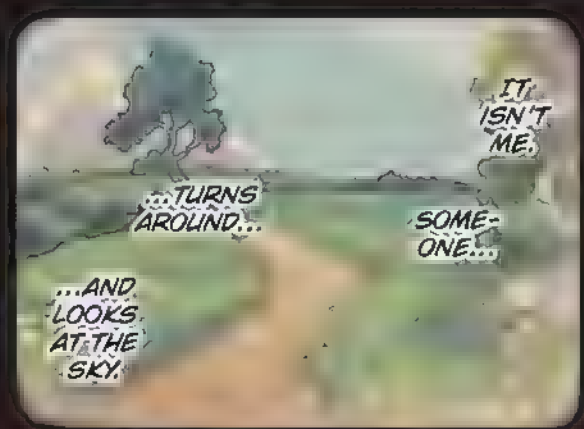
A
NEW
BODY

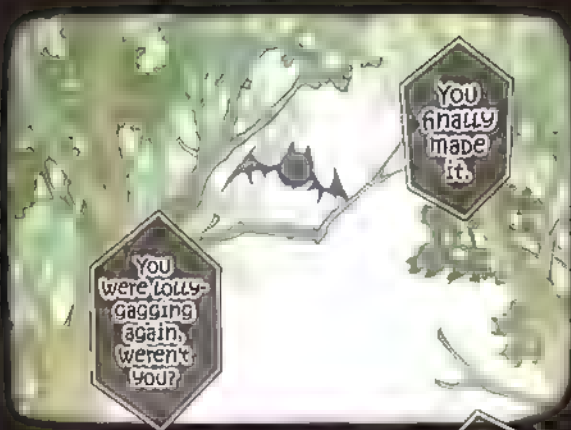


...AND
I THINK I
WOULD'VE
REACHED
IT...

A
LITTLE
MORE







You finally made it.

You were lolly-gagging again, weren't you?



ONE NIGHT, I HELD KURO-CHAN'S HAND...

...AND EVER SINCE...



I told you to come here straight away.

You got all that stuff on you...

...JUST from walking here?



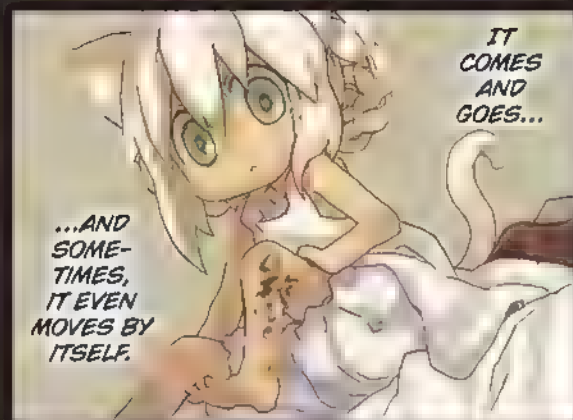
...THIS WEIRD, BLACK STUFF HAS BEEN...

...STUCK TO MINE.



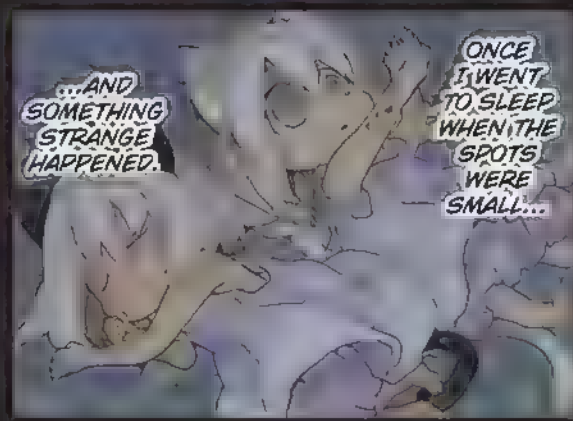
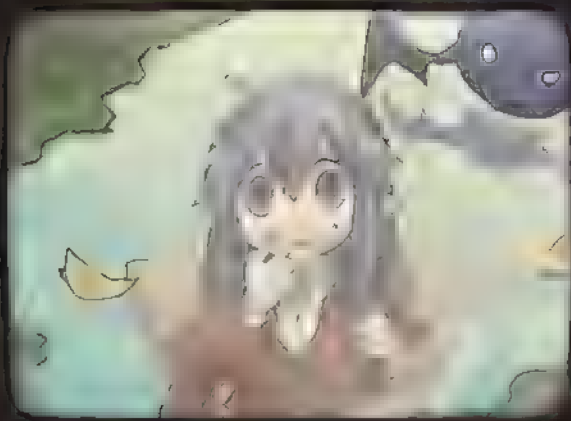
C'mere. Get a load of yourself...

...in this puddle.



IT COMES AND GOES...

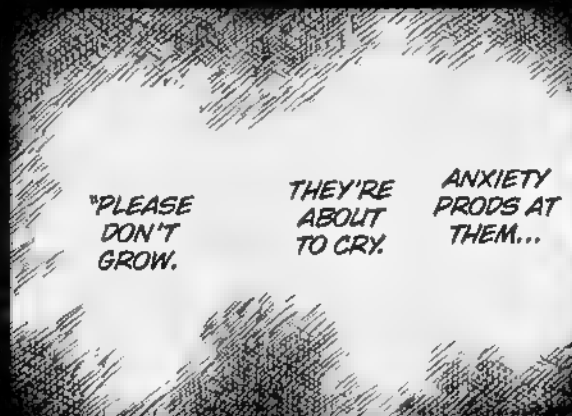
...AND SOMETIMES, IT EVEN MOVES BY ITSELF.



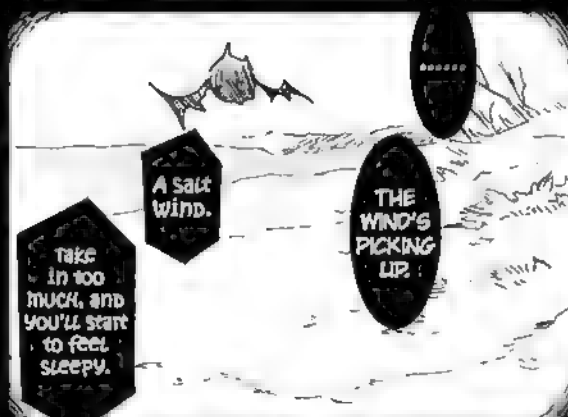
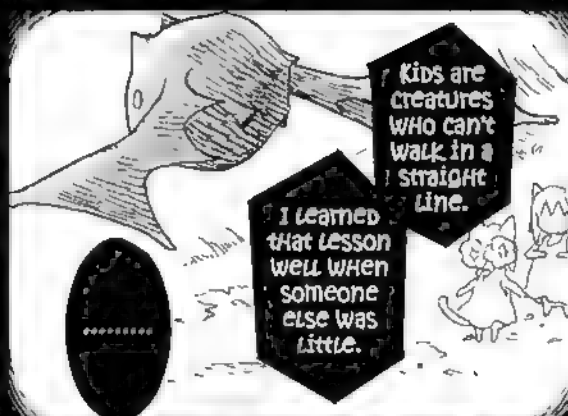
...AND SOMETHING STRANGE HAPPENED.

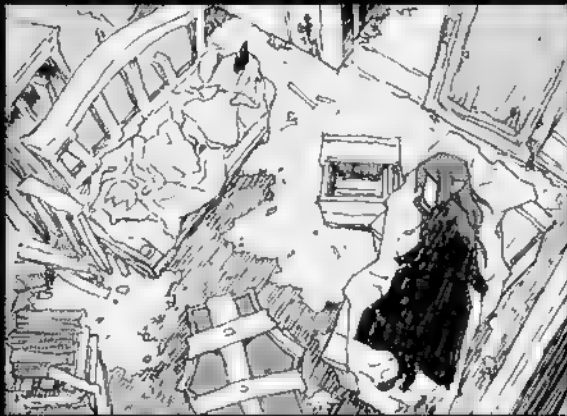
ONCE I WENT TO SLEEP WHEN THE SPOTS WERE SMALL...











THIS IS
SOMEONE'S
ARM...

I KNOW
I'VE SEEN
THE PERSON
WITH THIS ARM
BEFORE.



HEY,
SEN...

WHY
DO I...

...DREAM?



...SO SHE
DOESN'T
HAVE TO
THINK
ABOUT
THEM
ANYMORE.

SHE'S
HIDING
THE BLACK
STUFF...



...the
answer
lies
within
the
dreamer.

MM?
OH, THAT.
WHERE DID
WE LEAVE
OFF?

well,
ultimately,
what I can
say is...
for all
dreams...



...HAS
BECOME
A DELUGE
SOMEWHERE
ALONG THE
LINE.

WHAT WAS
ONCE A
SMALL
DROP OF
ANXIETY...



...so
badly
you're
sacrificing
sleep for
it.

It must
mean you
want to
know
some-
thing...

Dreams
don't just
happen
on their
own.



I CAN'T TELL
ANYMORE.

HOW
DOES
KURO-
CHAN
FEEL?









I HAVE
WEIRD
BLACK
SPOTS...

...ON MY
HAND.



HEY,
NIJUKU...



I KNOW
KURO-
CHAN...

...IS
REALLY
TROUBLED
BY THEM.



KURO-
CHAN
REALLY
DOES...

...LOVE
US.



BUT
I...

...DON'T
HATE
THEM...



...BECAUSE
NOW I
HAVE...

...A PIECE
OF KURO-
CHAN...



I'VE
KNOWN
THAT FOR A
LONG TIME
NOW.

YOU
REALLY
ARE SLOW,
SANJU.



...I BECAME
INTERESTED
IN FIRSTHAND
ACCOUNTS OF
A PERSON IN
A STRANGE
OUTFIT.

WHILE
LOOKING
THROUGH
CLUTTERED
PILES
OF OLD
NOTES...



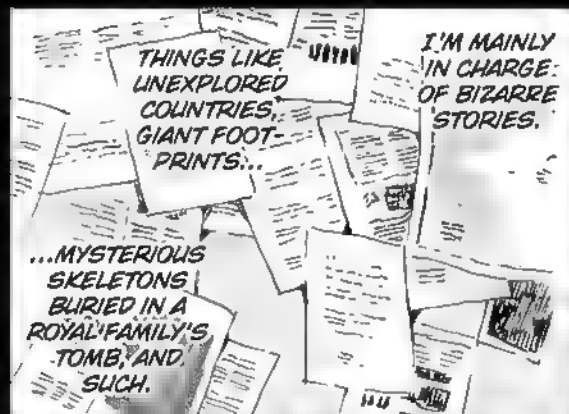
I'VE JUST
STARTED
WRITING AN
INVESTIGATIVE
ARTICLE.

I'M EMILY,
A NOVICE
REPORTER.



...WHO
WOULD GO
HERE AND
THERE,
BEARING
A COFFIN
ON THEIR
BACK.

THE
STORIES
WERE OF
A MYST-
ERIOUS
TRAVELER
IN
BLACK...

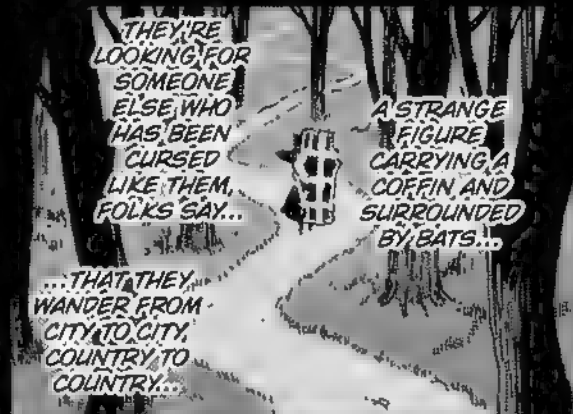


THINGS LIKE
UNEXPLORED
COUNTRIES,
GIANT FOOT-
PRINTS...

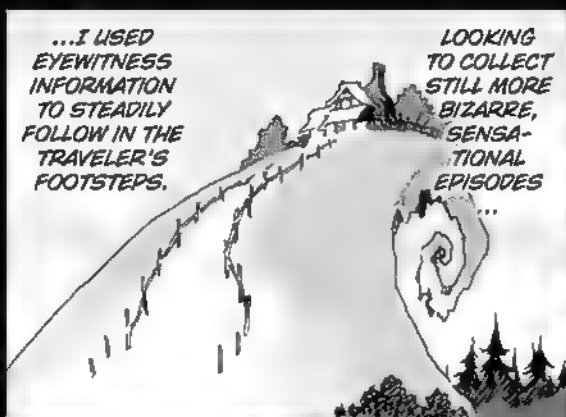
I'M MAINLY
IN CHARGE
OF BIZARRE
STORIES.

...MYSTERIOUS
SKELETONS
BURIED IN A
ROYAL FAMILY'S
TOMB, AND
SUCH.









...I USED EYEWITNESS INFORMATION TO STEADILY FOLLOW IN THE TRAVELER'S FOOTSTEPS.

LOOKING TO COLLECT STILL MORE BIZARRE, SENSATIONAL EPISODES ...



HONESTLY, I ALMOST DIED...

SOMEONE IN BLACK BEARING A COFFIN ...

YES, YES. I REMEMBER IT WELL.



I HEARD HE CAME HERE...

HE DRESSES LIKE THIS AND CARRIES A COFFIN.

...SO WOULD YOU TELL ME ABOUT IT?



THERE WAS A FIGURE IN BLACK, CARRYING A COFFIN!!

IT HAPPENED WHEN I WAS MAKING MY WAY THROUGH THE FOREST TO VISIT MY SON AND HIS WIFE TO CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF THEIR CHILD.

...GLARING DOWN AT ME FROM A RIDGE ABOVE.



YES...OF COURSE I REMEMBER.

I MET THE CHILD, BEARING A COFFIN ...

...ONLY ONCE QUITE SOME TIME AGO.



...A FLOCK OF BATS APPEARED FROM BEHIND THE FIGURE. THEY SWOOPED DOWN AND GRABBED MY ARMS AND LEGS...

AS I STUMBLED BACKWARD...

...AND I SUDDENLY FOUND MYSELF FLOATING IN THE AIR...

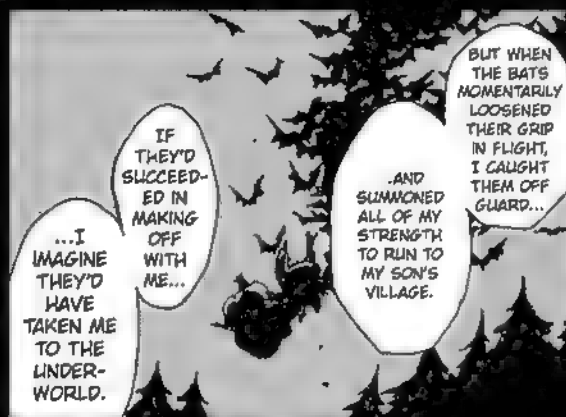


PLEASE COME IN.

HUH!?

I HAVE A FEELING EATING SOME BEAUTIFULLY BAKED PLUM CAKE WITH YOU...

...WILL HELP JOG MY MEMORY.

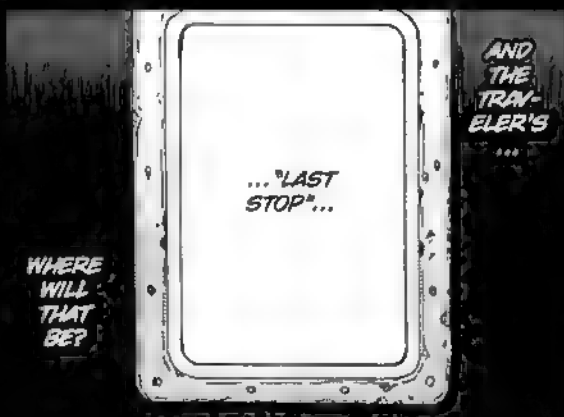
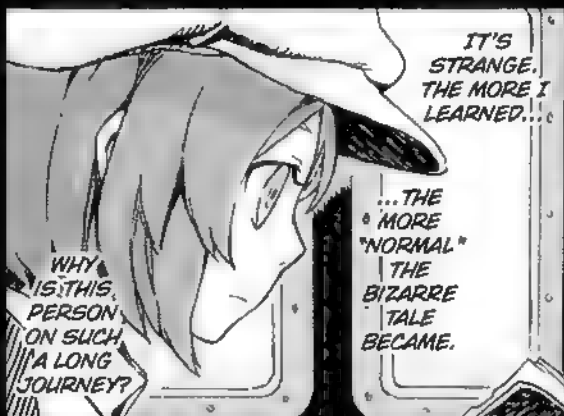
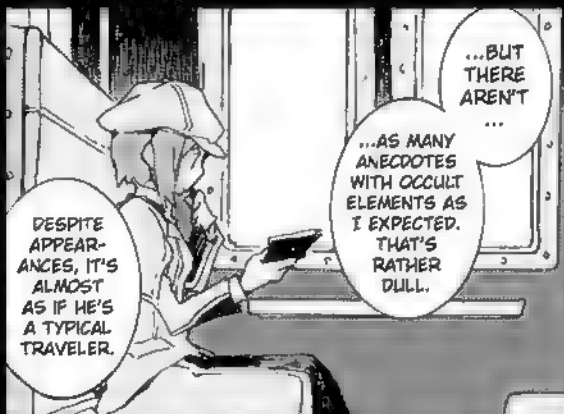


IF THEY'D SUCCEEDED IN MAKING OFF WITH ME...

...I IMAGINE THEY'D HAVE TAKEN ME TO THE UNDER-WORLD.

...AND SUMMONED ALL OF MY STRENGTH TO RUN TO MY SON'S VILLAGE.

BUT WHEN THE BATS MOMENTARILY LOOSENED THEIR GRIP IN FLIGHT, I CAUGHT THEM OFF GUARD...





I REMEMBER, MOM!

THE TRAVELER WHO CAME TO ASK FOR DIRECTIONS!

A TRAVELER WITH A COFFIN ...?

NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, I BELIEVE I DID SEE SUCH A PERSON ONCE...



...AND STRUCK UP AN ACQUAINTANCE THERE WITH A YOUNG WOMAN WHO WAS SEARCHING FOR HER MISSING PARENTS.

I HAPPENED TO DROP BY A POST OFFICE...



OH DEAR... THEN MY MOTHER MAY GET LOST ON THE WAY.

IS THAT RIGHT ...?

OH, YOU'LL WANT TO STAY OFF THE PATH THROUGH THE FOREST.

IT'S IMPASSABLE AFTER THE LIGHTNING STRIKE THE NIGHT BEFORE LAST.

GRAND-MA?



CHANGED ...?

YES, I KNOW WHO YOU MEAN. THE TRAVELER CARRYING A COFFIN, RIGHT?

MY LIFE HAS CHANGED, THANKS TO THAT PERSON.



WILL YOU TELL ME WHAT YOUR GRAND-MOTHER LOOKS LIKE?

THANK YOU FOR THE WARNING. I'LL GO ON AHEAD AND TELL HER.

SO THE TRAVELER SAID TO ME...



...AS IF MY INTERNAL LANDSCAPE AND MY EVERYDAY LIFE...

...SOMEHOW LOOKED COMPLETELY DIFFERENT.

WE ONLY TALKED FOR A SHORT TIME...

...BUT IT WAS AS IF I WERE A CARD FLIPPED FROM FACE-UP TO FACE-DOWN...



...BUT NOT LONG AFTER, GRANDMA ARRIVED WITH A FURIOUS LOOK IN HER EYES.

AND THEN, THE TRAVELER LEFT...



BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, YOU...

...MIGHT FIND SOMETHING INSIDE OF YOU HAS BEEN "TURNED AROUND" TOO.

THE TRAVELER IS MOST CERTAINLY A PECULIAR PERSON. BE CAREFUL.



OH,
THEM?

AH-HA-HA!
YES, I KNOW
THEM. SURE
TAKES ME
BACK.



I WANT
NOTHING
MORE TO
DO WITH
THAT
ONE.

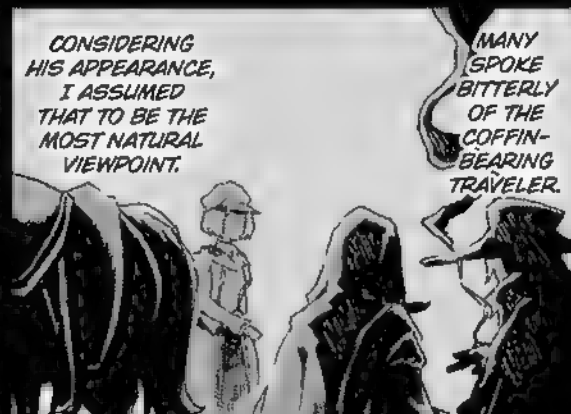
DON'T
ASK.

A
TRAVELER
WITH A
COFFIN?!



...RECOUNTED
THE MEETING
WITH A
BEAMING
SMILE.

SOMETIMES,
THE PEOPLE
I TALKED
TO WHO HAD
ENCOUN-
TERED THE
TRAVELER'S
COMPANY
ON THEIR
JOURNEY...



CONSIDERING
HIS APPEARANCE,
I ASSUMED
THAT TO BE THE
MOST NATURAL
VIEWPOINT.

MANY
SPOKE
BITTERLY
OF THE
COFFIN-
BEARING
TRAVELER.



I
WONDER
WHAT
THEY'RE
DOING
NOW.

NIJUKU
AND
SANJU
TOO!

WELL,
DON'T
MATTER
WHERE
THEY ARE.
I JUST HOPE
THEY'RE
ALL DOIN'
WELL.



AND
YET...

...ARE
NEVER
FAR
FROM MY
MIND.

THOSE
TRAVEL-
ERS...



...WHAT
THEY DID
FOR ME.

IF YOU
DO SEE
THEM,
PLEASE
PASS ON
A MES-
SAGE.

TELL THEM
I'LL NEVER
FORGET...



...I WAS
JUST
PURSUING
THEIR
"FOOT-
PRINTS."

AS
ALWAYS...

IT WAS
THE
USUAL.



MY
NOTE-
BOOK'S
FULL UP,
SAVE FOR
ONE LAST
PAGE.

OH.

HOW
CARE-
LESS
OF
ME.



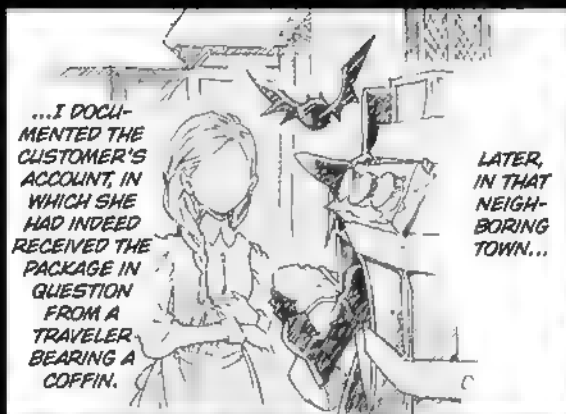
...THE
TRAVELER
MENTIONED
GOING
TO THE
NEIGHBOR-
ING TOWN,
SO THE
TAILOR
ENTRUSTED
HIM WITH A
'PACKAGE'
TO BE
DELIVERED
TO A
CUSTOMER
THERE.

THE OWNER
OF A SMALL
TAILOR SHOP
IN A CERTAIN
TOWN TOLD
ME THAT,
DURING THE
COURSE OF
A CHAT...



BUT
I DON'T
THINK THAT
WAY AT ALL
NOW.

I'M
NOSTALGIC
ABOUT THE
START OF MY
INVESTIGATION,
BACK WHEN
I USED THE
WORDS
"MYSTERIOUS
COFFIN
PERSON"
...



...I DOCU-
MENTED THE
CUSTOMER'S
ACCOUNT, IN
WHICH SHE
HAD INDEED
RECEIVED THE
PACKAGE IN
QUESTION
FROM A
TRAVELER
BEARING A
COFFIN.

LATER,
IN THAT
NEIGH-
BORING
TOWN...



I SEE.

MY
ORIGINAL
PURPOSE
HAS BEEN
TURNED
ON ITS
HEAD.



—AND
THAT...

...WAS THE
LAST OF THE
FOOTPRINTS.



...WANT TO
MEET THIS
TRAVELER.

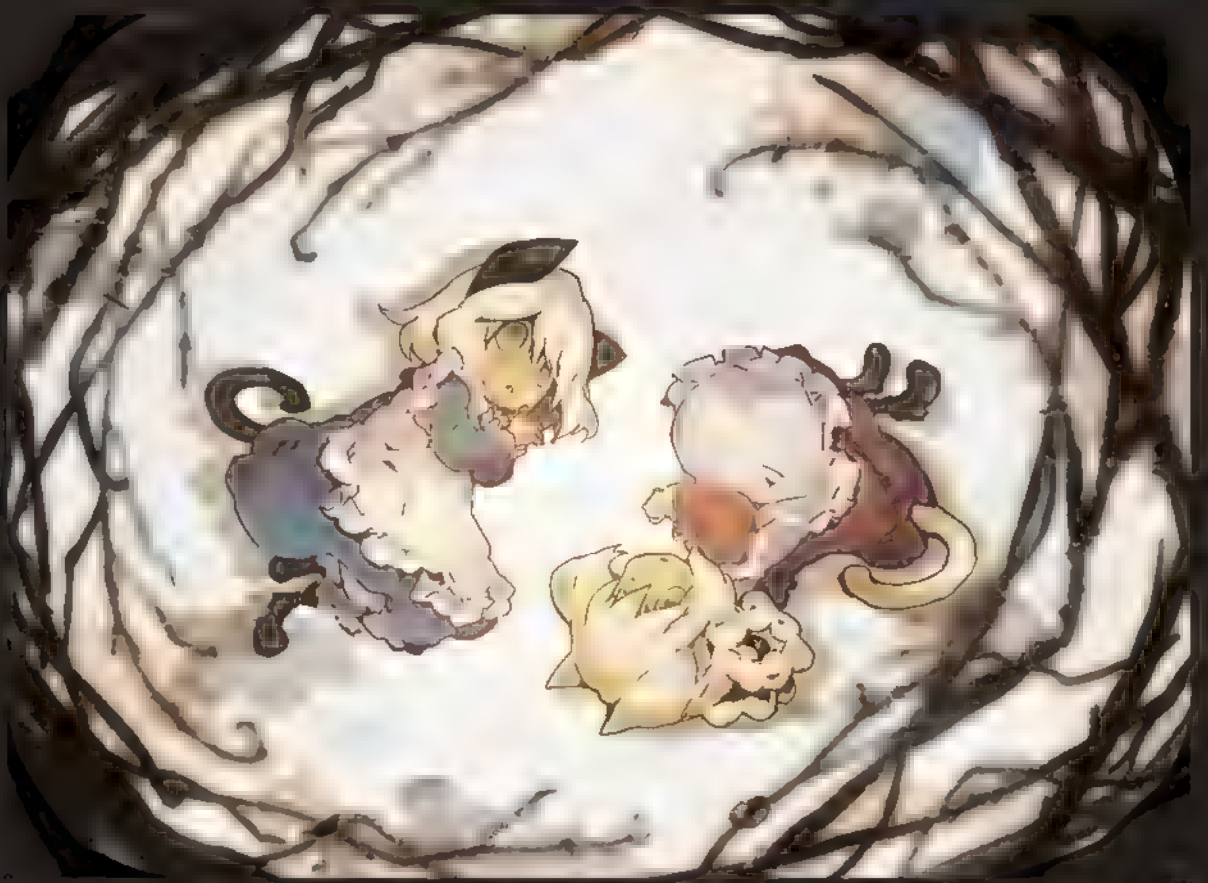
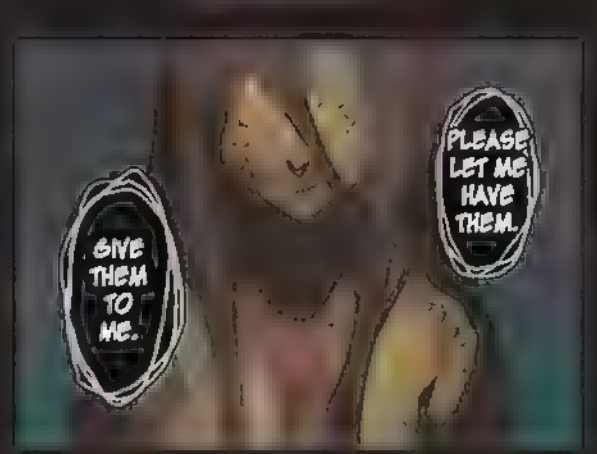
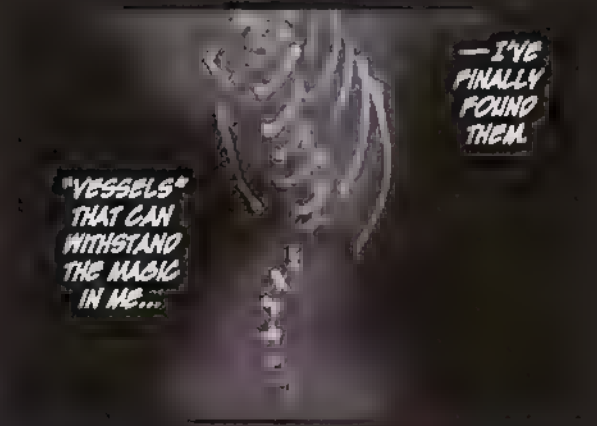
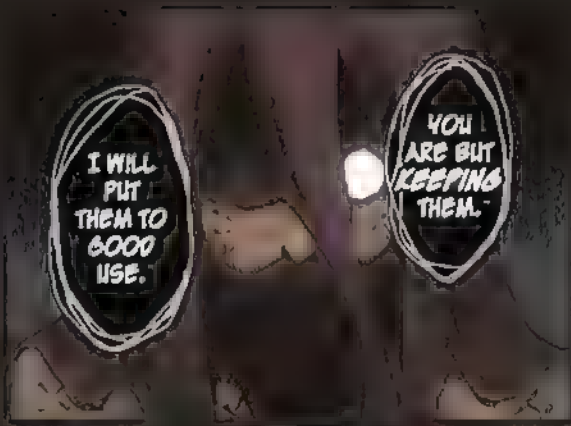
NOW I
SINCERELY
...





Someday, having to let go of that hand...
Someday, turning that hand black...

The traveler had long been afraid of both
possibilities but, ultimately, chose one.





...MAYBE THEY CAN HEAR IT CHANGE AROUND THEM.

WHEN THE WEATHER CHANGES...

whoa, it really is raining!

HOW'D THEY KNOW?



WHAT'S WRONG ...?

don't go on ahead yet.

KURO...



I DON'T WANT THE PACKAGE TO GET WET...

KURO-CHA!

CRAP. THERE ISN'T ANY KIND OF SHELTER AROUND HERE.



RAIN?

NIJUKU AND SANJU SAID...

...IT'S PROBABLY GONNA RAIN SOON.



HEAR WHAT?

KURO-CHAN, THIS WAY!

WE CAN HEAR IT OVER HERE.



STILL, IF THEY BOTH SAID IT TOGETHER, I TEND TO BELIEVE IT.

I CAN'T TELL MYSELF...

...BUT THOSE CLOUDS DON'T LOOK MENACING TO ME.



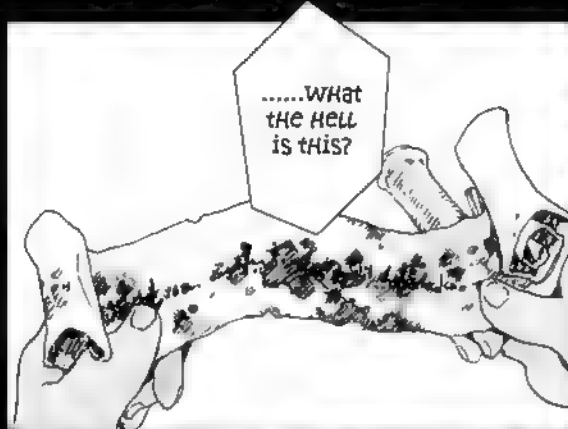
A VOICE SAYING...

...IF YOU WANT TO GET OUTTA THE RAIN, C'MON OVER.



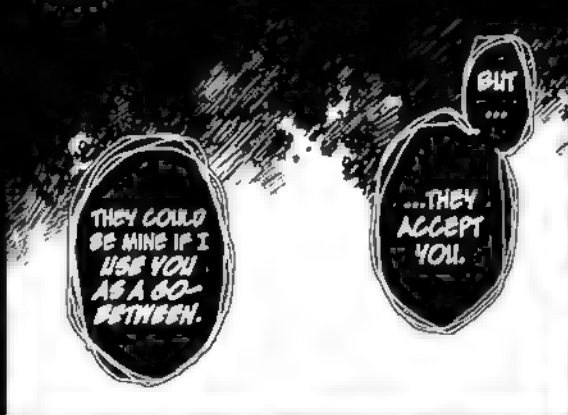
...BETTER THAN ANYONE AT PREDICTING THE WEATHER.

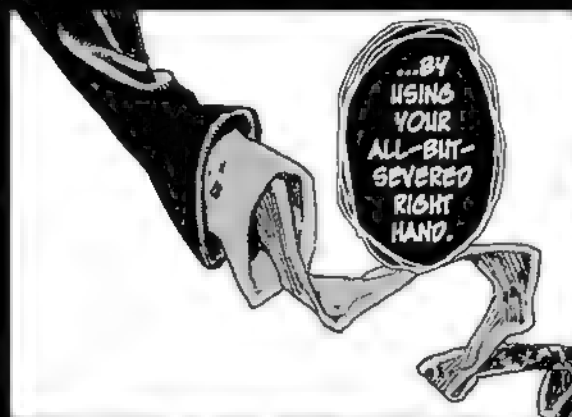
ON THIS JOURNEY, THOSE TWO HAVE BEEN...







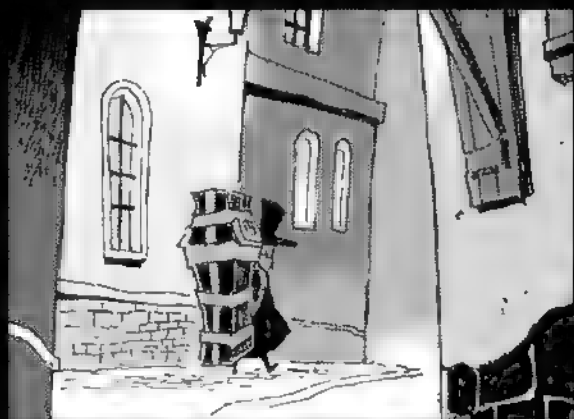
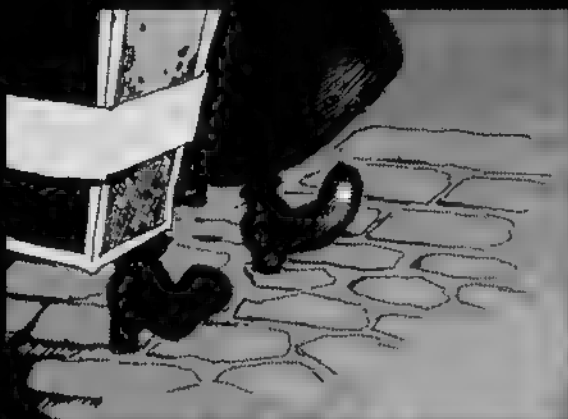


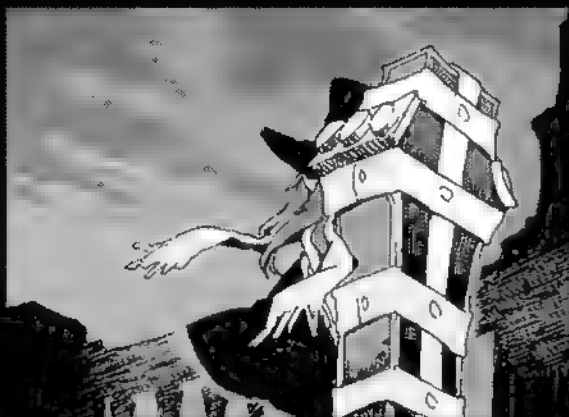












I
HATE TO
ADMIT IT,
BUT
HIFUMI'S
RIGHT.

JUST...

...BEING
WITH
ME...



...WHAT
SHOULD
I DO?

WHAT A
PICKLE.



THAT
ALONE
MAKES IT
UNAVOID-
ABLE.



IT'S
GONE
NOW.






.....
SO YOU
CAME.



MY
REASON
FOR
CONTINUING
THIS
JOURNEY...

IT'S
ALL
GONE
NOW.




AN
UNHAPPY
ENDING...

I DON'T
RETURN
TO NORMAL
AND END
UP IN THE
COFFIN.

...SHE
TOLD ME
ABOUT
THEN...

...ONE
MORE
TYPE OF
ENDING...

—AND...



I'VE
OFTEN
IMAGINED
—IT TILL
—NOW.

WHEN
AND HOW
WILL MY
JOURNEY
"END"?



A HAPPY
ENDING...

THE
CURSE IS
BROKEN,
AND I
RETURN
TO MY
"NORMAL
FORM."





...BE-
CAUSE YOU
EARNESTLY
WISHED

...TO
SEE
ME.

I
CAME

INNO-
CENT
CHILD.



THIS IS
THE REAL
HIFUMI.

IT ISN'T
A HALLU-
CINATION
BEFORE
ME.



I DON'T
THINK
HIFUMI
WOULD'VE
COME
FROM AN
EARNEST
WISH
ALONE.

...
THAT'S
...

...HALF
A LIE.



...THIS
EASY
FOR US
TO MEET,
HUH?

IT
WAS
...

.....



...BECAUSE
IT WAS
FINALLY
"WORTH IT"
FOR HER
TO MEET
ME...

SHE
APPEARED
DIRECTLY
LIKE
THIS...



I
TOLD
YOU.

WE'VE
ALWAYS
BEEN
TOGETH-
ER.

...EVEN
THOUGH I
COULDN'T
FIND A
SINGLE
CLUE...

I'VE BEEN
FOLLOWING
YOU AROUND
THE WORLD
ALL THIS
TIME...



...
NIJUKU
AND
SANJU.

...AND,
BEYOND
ME...



YOU
COULDN'T
FIND AN
ANSWER

...SO
YOU IDLY
CONTINUED
YOUR
JOURNEY.

IT'S
NOT
THAT WE
COULDN'T
MEET.

YOU'RE
THE ONE
WHO WAS
RUNNING
AWAY!



...BUT
WOULD
YOU TELL
ME...

I
HAVEN'T
FULFILLED
MY
PROMISE
TO
YOU...

HIFUMI
...



...SO
NO MATTER
WHAT CHOICE
I MAKE...

I'M
CERTAIN
NOW...

...I'LL
HAVE SOME
REGRETS.



...BY
OBTAINING
YOUR OWN
"DEATH"?

...WHAT
YOU WERE
REALLY
HOPING
TO GET...



LET
ME GET
ONE MORE
THING
CLEAR.

HIFUMI...



WELL,
THAT
DOESN'T
MATTER
NOW.

WHAT
COULD
IT HAVE
BEEN?

...WHO
KNOWS?



...CAN'T
TURN MY
BODY BACK
TO NORMAL,
CAN YOU?

I BET
EVEN
YOU...

THE
BLACK
MAGIC
THAT'S
EATING
AWAY AT
ME IS THE
SAME FOR
YOU.



IF WE
HAVE THE
TREASURES
YOU
PICKED
UP...

...CAN
EVENTUALLY
TRANSCEND
DEATH.

BOTH
YOU
AND
I...



NITHER
YOU NOR
I...

...HAVE A
FORMER
BODY TO
GO BACK
TO.

THIS
IS YOU
NOW.



DON'T
TELL
ME...

...
YOU'RE
TRYING
...



ALL
THEY CAN
DO IS MELT
TOGETHER
AND
BECOME
GRAY
SOUP.

...CAN'T
GO BACK
TO THEIR
ORIGINAL
STATES.

ONCE
STIRRED UP
IN A POT,
INGREDI-
ENTS...



...TO
ABSORB
ME?



THAT'S
RIGHT.

IT'S
"MAGIC"
NO TAUGHT
ME RIGHT
BEFORE
SHE DIED.



I SEE.



THEN
I WON'T
HESITATE
ANYMORE.



WE'VE
ALREADY
USED IT
ONCE.

YOU
DON'T
REMEM-
BER?

WHEN
WE MADE
A PACT
WITH THAT
WITCH...



JUST
AS WE'RE
CONNECTED
TO THE
WITCH
NOW...

...YOU
AND I ARE
CONNECTED
TOO...



...WE
EXCHANGED
JUST A
LITTLE OF
OUR INSIDES
WITH THE
WITCH.

BACK
THEN...



...IS TAKE
THE PART
OF ME
I DON'T
WANT TO
LOSE.

WE CAN
DO THE
SAME
THING.

ALL YOU
HAVE TO DO
...



...
ENCOUN-
TERED
THAT
WITCH
TOO.

—I
SEE.

SO
YOU...



...BUT
IN THE END,
I COULDN'T
DO IT,
NOT THE
KIND OF
MAGIC I'D
IMAGINED.

I WANTED
TO BE ABLE
TO USE
MAGIC...

...SO I
ASKED
HER...



SEEING
YOU
REMINDED
ME.

BUT...

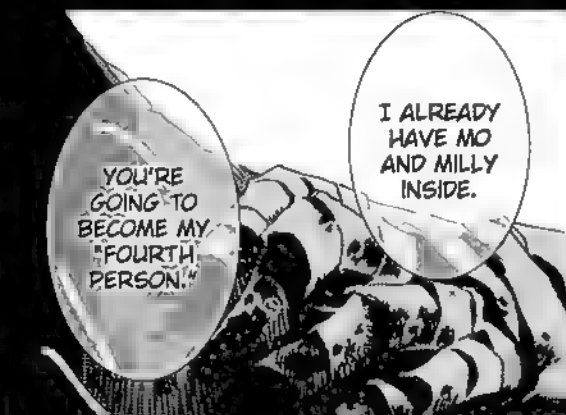
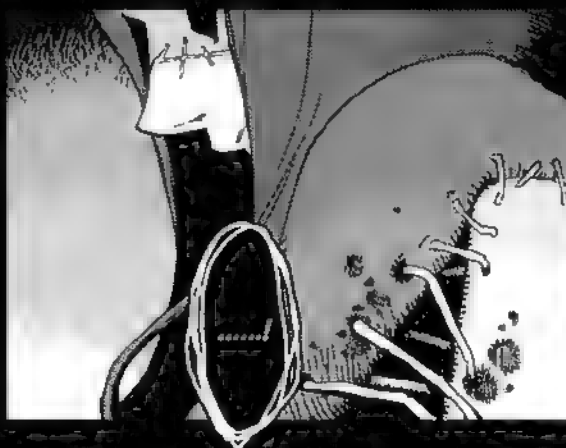
....
THERE IS
ONE
THING
I CAN
DO.



MAGIC
ONLY
WE CAN
USE...

MAGIC,
YOU AND
I CAN
USE...









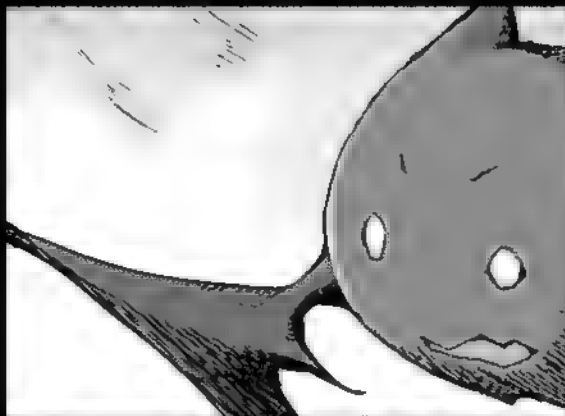
I AM
EVER IN
CHARGE...

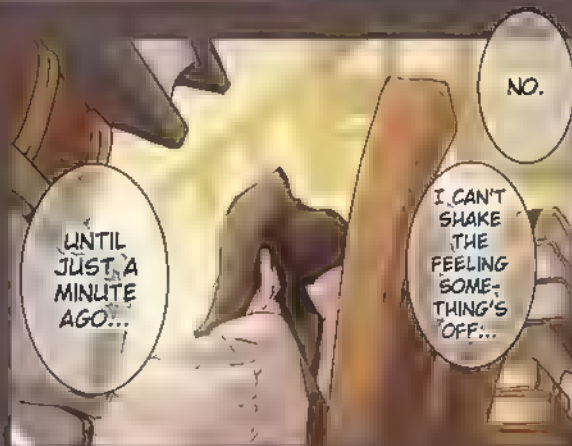
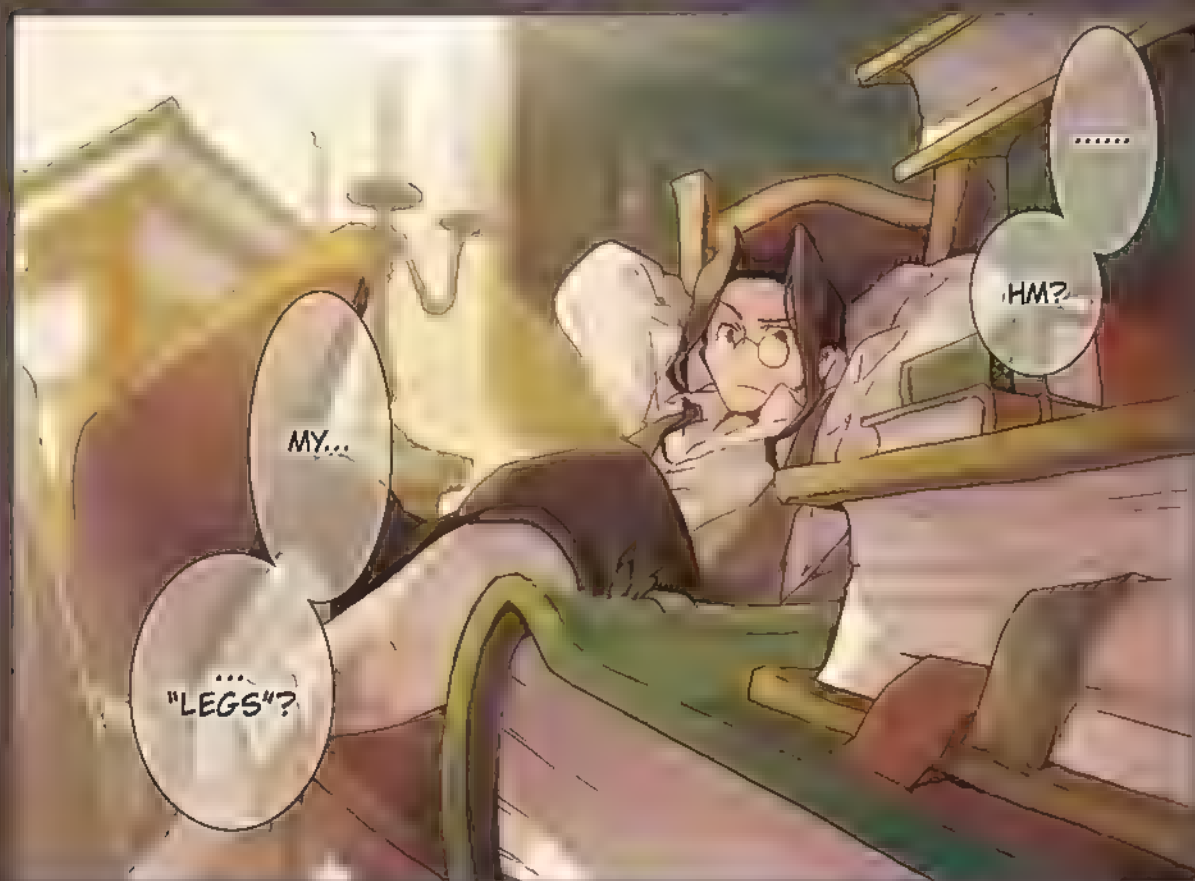
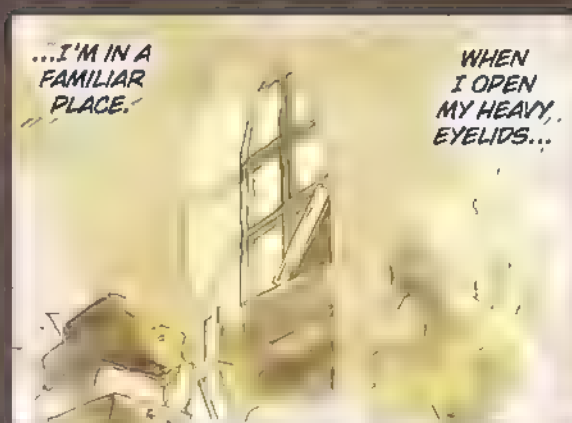
...WHEREAS
YOU CANNOT
EVEN HANDLE
MY MAGIC...

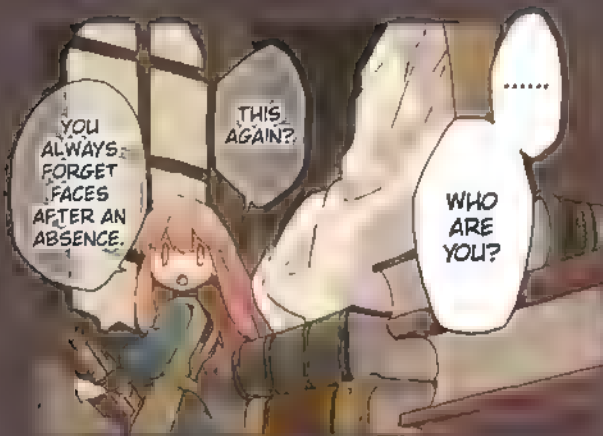
...YOU
CRACKED
CONTAINER
FULL OF
BLACK
SEDIMENT.







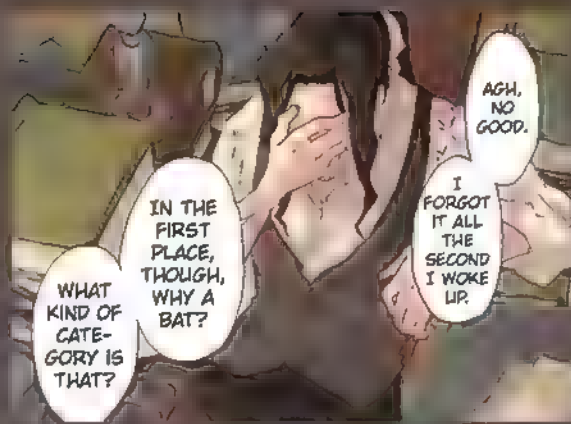




YOU ALWAYS FORGET FACES AFTER AN ABSENCE.

THIS AGAIN?

.....
WHO ARE YOU?

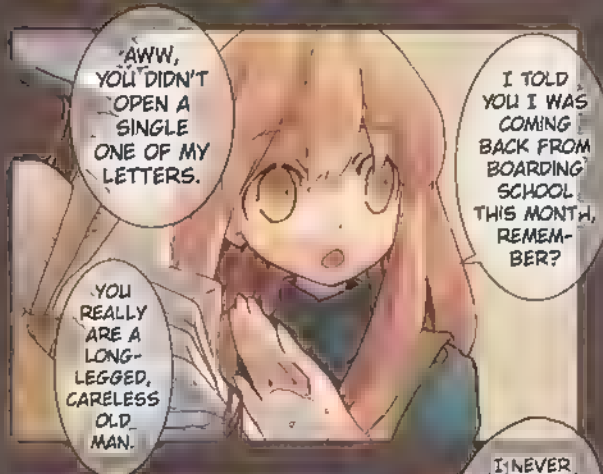


AGH, NO GOOD.

I FORGOT IT ALL THE SECOND I WOKE UP.

IN THE FIRST PLACE, THOUGH, WHY A BAT?

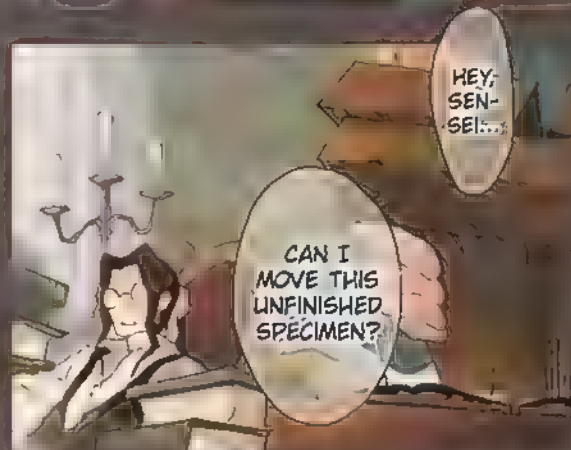
WHAT KIND OF CATEGORY IS THAT?



AWW, YOU DIDN'T OPEN A SINGLE ONE OF MY LETTERS.

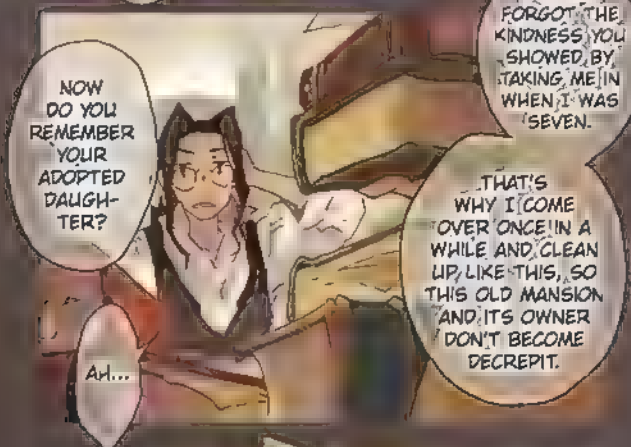
YOU REALLY ARE A LONG-LEGGED, CARELESS OLD MAN.

I TOLD YOU I WAS COMING BACK FROM BOARDING SCHOOL THIS MONTH, REMEMBER?



HEY, SENSEI...

CAN I MOVE THIS UNFINISHED SPECIMEN?

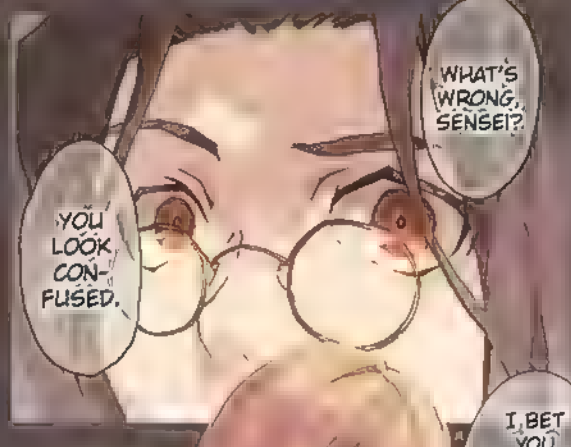


NOW DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR ADOPTED DAUGHTER?

AH...

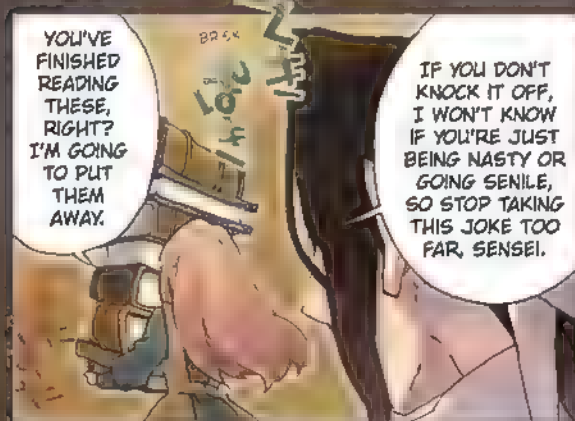
I NEVER FORGOT THE KINDNESS YOU SHOWED BY TAKING ME IN WHEN I WAS SEVEN.

...THAT'S WHY I COME OVER ONCE IN A WHILE AND CLEAN UP, LIKE THIS, SO THIS OLD MANSION AND ITS OWNER DON'T BECOME DECREPIT.



WHAT'S WRONG, SENSEI?

YOU LOOK CONFUSED.



YOU'VE FINISHED READING THESE, RIGHT? I'M GOING TO PUT THEM AWAY.

IF YOU DON'T KNOCK IT OFF, I WON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE JUST BEING NASTY OR GOING SENILE, SO STOP TAKING THIS JOKE TOO FAR, SENSEI.



...AND THEN WOKE UP IN THE MIDDLE OF A DREAM.

I BET YOU NODDED OFF AGAIN WHILE READING A BOOK...





...I'D
SOMEWHAT
SERIOUSLY
BEEN
PLANNING
A JOURNEY
AROUND
THE
WORLD.

COME
TO THINK
OF IT,
AT THE
TIME...

AH YES.
IT'S ALL
COMING
BACK
NOW.



I ALWAYS
DID INTEND
TO LEAVE
HERE
EVENTU-
ALLY.

THAT'S
UNUSUALLY
ACTIVE
FOR YOU,
SENSEI.

...AND
GATHERING
NOVEL
INSECTS
AND PLANTS
WOULD BE
A CHARMING
WAY TO
LIVE.

BUT THEN, I
THOUGHT
TRAVELING
AROUND
FOREIGN
LANDS ...



WHAT?
THAT CAME
OUTTA
NOWHERE.

BY
THE
WAY,
SENSEI!
...

...ARE
THEY
FINALLY
EXILING
YOU FROM
THE
VILLAGE?

WELL,
IT LOOKS
LIKE YOU'RE
PREPARING
FOR A
TRIP.



INFO
ABOUT
FOREIGN
COUNTRIES,
CROSSING
ROUTES,
AND
SUCH...

EARLIER,
I FOUND...

...SOME
THINGS
BETWEEN
THE PAGES
OF THE
JOURNAL
OF ROBUR'S
TRAVELS.

IT LOOKS
LIKE YOU
PUT A LOT
OF TIME
INTO THAT
RESEARCH.



I
WOULD'VE
SOLD THE
MANSION AT
THE PROPER
TIME TO
FINANCE THE
EXPEDITION.

IT WAS
A SLOPPY
PLAN, YET
ONE OF A
LONG-
TERM
NATURE.

THERE ARE
LIMITS TO
TRAVELING
SOLO, SO
I THOUGHT
TO RAISE AN
ASSISTANT.

HUH?



I CAN'T
MAKE OUT
YOUR
WRITING.
WHAT DOES
IT SAY?

AH...
THAT
DOES
RING A
BELL.

HERE
ARE
HARVEST
ROUTES
AND NE-
GOTIATING
PROCE-
DURES.

IT'S A
LIST OF
PLANTS,
CATEGO-
RIZED BY
CONTI-
NENT.



YES,
WELL
...

WAIT,
MAYBE
YOU
WERE...

YOU
SHOWED
UP INSTEAD,
SO THAT
BROUGHT
MY PLANS
TO A HALT.

...GOING
TO ADOPT
A BOY?



WHY IS
YOUR FIRST
INSTINCT TO
CONNECT
EVERYTHING
I DO WITH
SOME FORM
OF SKUL-
DUGGERY?

DON'T DO
IT, SENSEI!
ILLEGAL
DRUG
CULTIVATION
AND MANU-
FACTURING
...!!

I TOLD YOU
I'D GET A
JOB TO PAY
YOU BACK
FOR TUITION,
REMEMBER?!

HUH!?



LIKE MY TRUE HOME-LAND...



DON'T BE A FOOL. I'VE LEARNED MY LESSON ABOUT TRAVELING WITH YOU.

YOUR TASTE IN TRAVELING CLOTHES IS AWFUL, AND YOU PICK UP STRANGE CHILDREN ON THE WAY.



YOU CAN CLEAN THAT UP AS YOU SEE FIT.



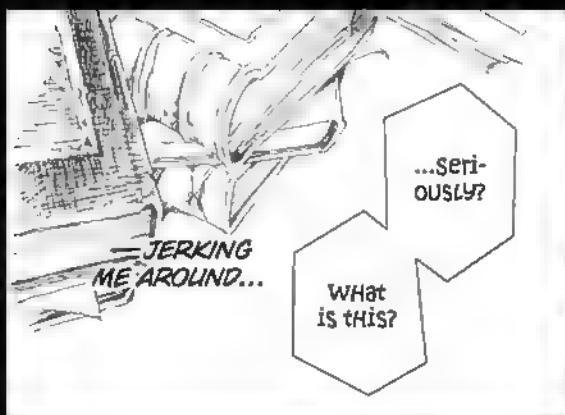
I'M SURE...



BUT, WELL... YES.

I'LL LIKELY SOON BE RELEASED FROM MY BURDEN OF MANY YEARS.





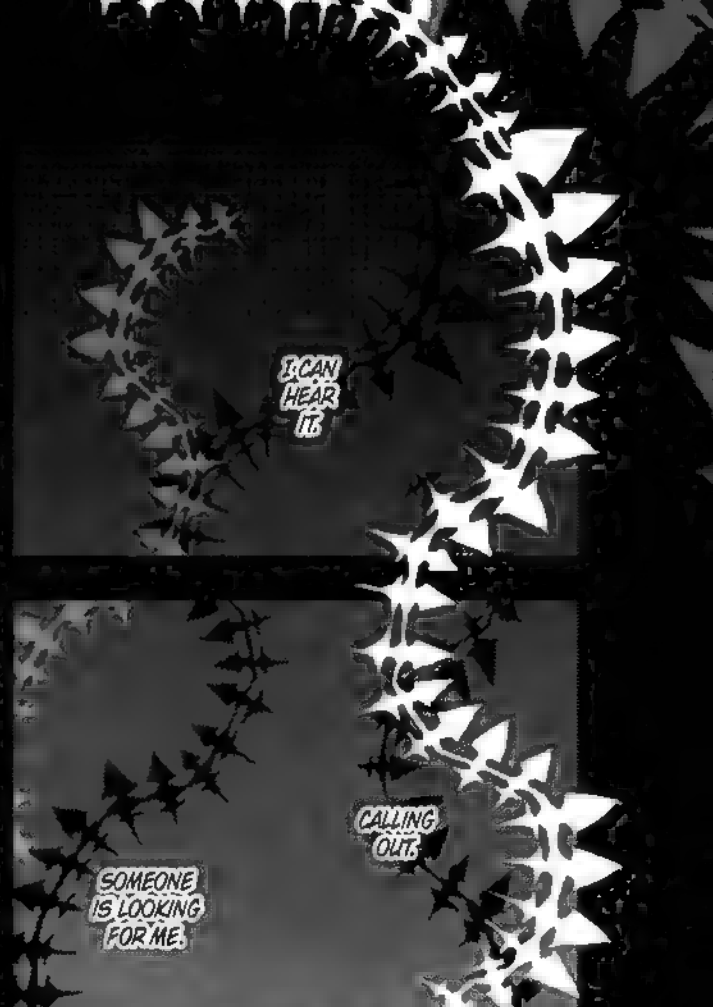


WHAT
SHOULD
I DO?



I CAN'T
SEE
WELL.

I DON'T
HAVE ANY
SENSATIONS
IN MY ARMS
OR LEGS.

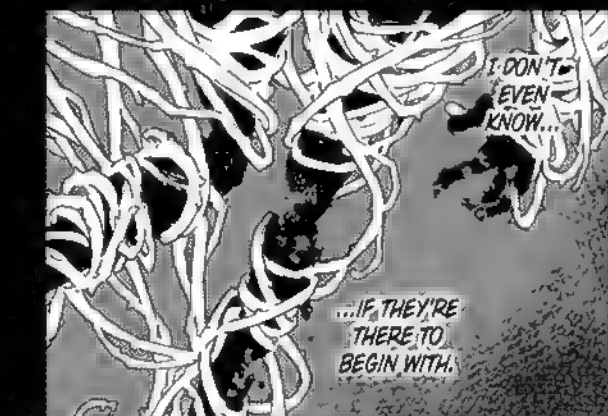


I CAN
HEAR
IT.



CALLING
OUT.

SOMEONE
IS LOOKING
FOR ME.



I DON'T
EVEN
KNOW...

...IF THEY'RE
THERE TO
BEGIN WITH.



THAT
VOICE...

BUT, RIGHT
NOW, AM I
"KURO"?

...IS
SEARCHING
FOR ME.

OR THE
"WITCH"?



I HAVE
TO GO...

...BUT...

...MY BODY
WON'T MOVE
THE WAY I
WANT IT TO.



I'M CAUGHT
UP IN THE
BANDAGES...

...AND
CAN'T MOVE
FORWARD.



I see.
You saw
something
too, huh?

ME
TOO?

Never
mind. Just
talkin' to
myself.



More
importantly,
you wanderin'
around outside
late at night
without saying
anything to us...
What's the
big idea?

Maybe
I should
give
you a
curfew?

...NO
FAIR.

LIKE
YOU CAN
LECTURE
ME
ABOUT
THAT?



Darn tootin'.
Who gave you
permission?

You're
still too
young to
enjoy the
nightlife.

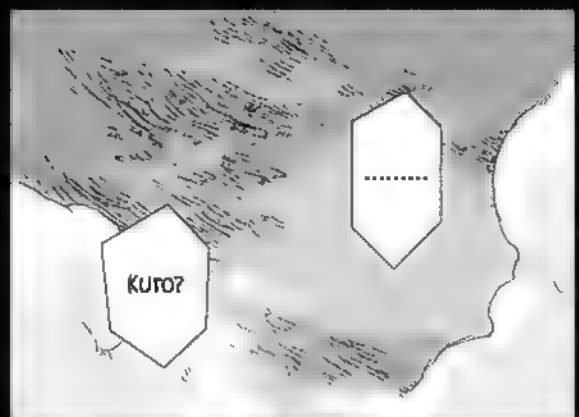


SEN,
YOUR
VOICE IS
HOARSE:

AND
YOU'RE
KINDA
WET...

SHUT
UP.

I was
flying
through
a heavy
fog, and
I caught a
chill...



KURO?



...SEN.

YOU
think
this is
good?

GOOD.



You look
like what
the cat
dragged
in.

I HAD A
STRANGE
DREAM...

...SO
I HAD A
FEELING YOU
WOULDN'T
RECOGNIZE
ME.



You're...

AH!



I think they're still at the inn...

OH, I'm the only one who flew out to find you.

OH, THAT'S RIGHT. SEN...

WHERE ARE NIJUKU AND SANJU?



I MEANT TO USE HER AS BAIT...

...BUT IT WASN'T YOU I WAS TRYING TO CATCH.



WHAT THE HECK? WE CAN'T DO ANYTHING TILL WE GET YOU BACK TO THE INN.

Stay here. I'll summon the rest of me.

OKAY, GOOD.

TAKE THEM AWAY FROM HERE TONIGHT.



...OF MY MAGIC.

OH.

YOU SMELL



THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT.

I CAN'T SEE THEM ANYMORE.

I MEAN TAKE THEM AWAY FROM ME.

IF I DO...



...AND TURN YOU INTO A BUG THIS TIME.

I THINK I'LL RIP YOU UP EVEN MORE

SKREEE



NO TELLING.

NO, NO.



DON'T
LOOK
AT HER
EYES.

!?



GET
AWAY!

SEN-
SEI...



TURN
AND FLY
AWAY...

...WITH-
OUT
LOOK-
ING
BACK.



THAT'S
RIGHT.



...FOR
HAVING
DRAGGED
YOU INTO
THIS, FOR
SO LONG.

I'M
SORRY
...



THIS IS
JUST...

...THAT
TIME ALL
OVER
AGAIN.

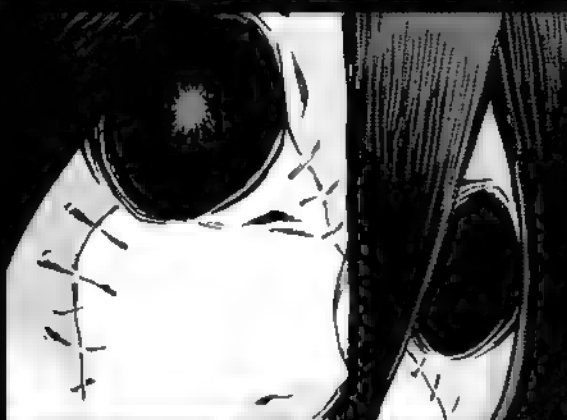


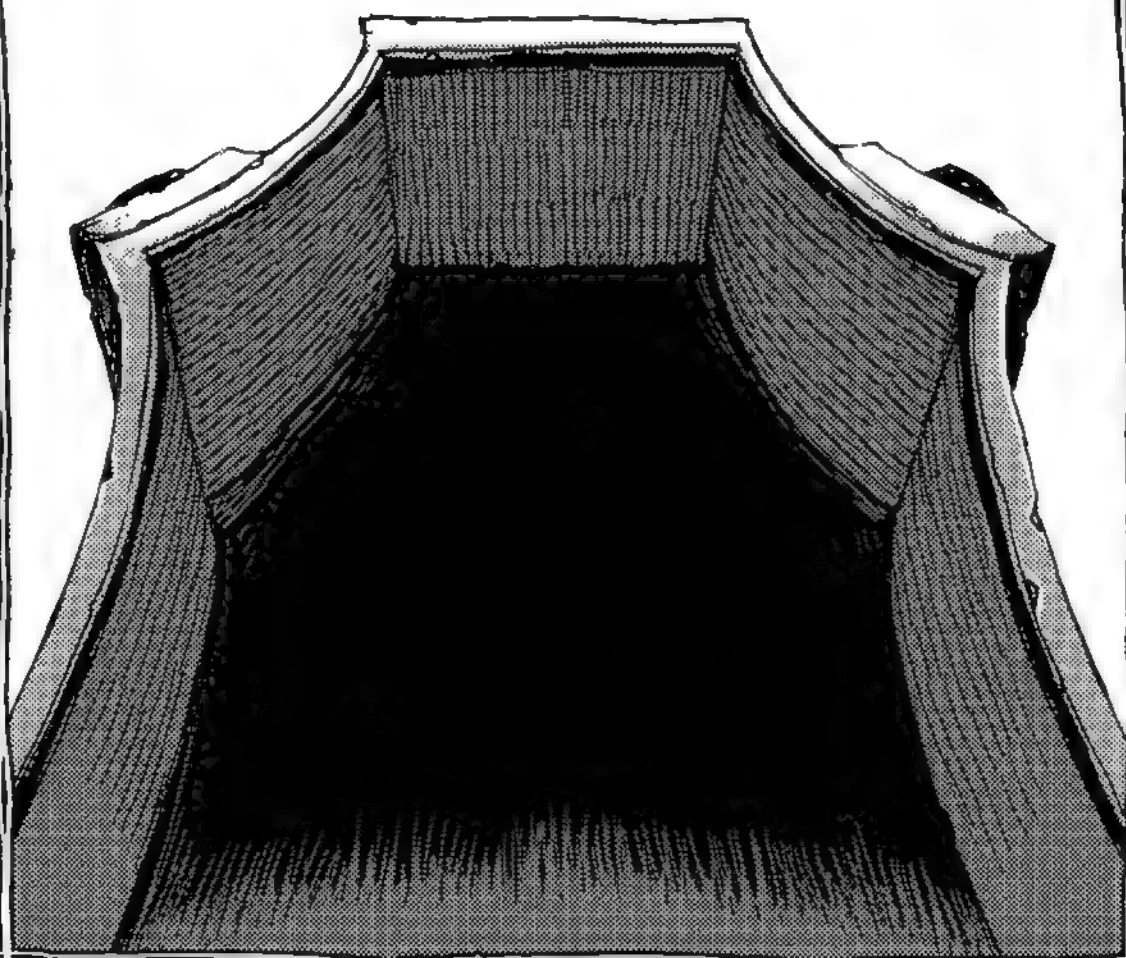
ESCAPE
...

...SEN.

THIS
TIME,
FOR
GOOD...







While gazing into the empty coffin, the traveler said,
"That's right. The thing I've been carrying all this time is..."





THAT'S TRUE.
THAT'S ANOTHER CHALLENGE.

I'VE GOT TO MAKE IT SMALLER.

TEE-HEE! BUT...

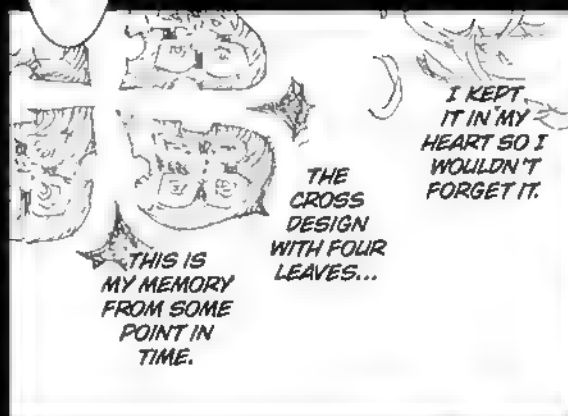
...AT THIS SIZE, I THINK IT'LL BE TOO HEAVY TO GO ROUND HER NECK.



YES. WELL, IF YOU ACCOMPLISH THAT...

... THEN BOTH I...

...AND THIS CHILD WILL...



I KEPT IT IN MY HEART SO I WOULDN'T FORGET IT.

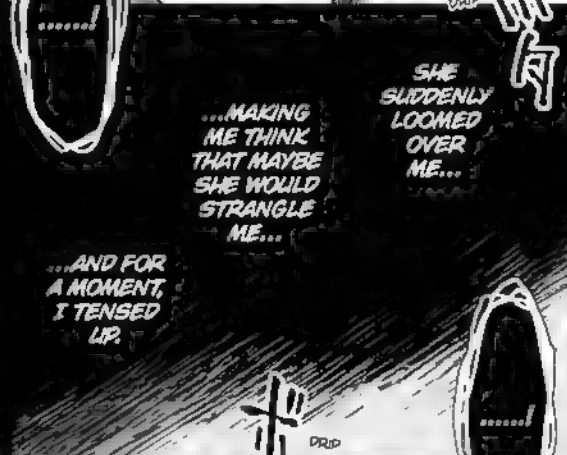
THE CROSS DESIGN WITH FOUR LEAVES...

THIS IS MY MEMORY FROM SOME POINT IN TIME.



A MEMORY...

...FROM BEFORE I BECAME HIFUMI.











YOU CAN'T ANSWER, CAN YOU?

I'M SURE NO ONE CAN FIND MY NAME.



NOT YET!

IT'S NOT OVER YET.



THAT'S RIGHT (IT'S) IMPOSSIBLE.

THERE IS NO ONE LEFT.

WHO KNOWS ABOUT YOU.



No. THREE

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR DEAREST WISH, REUNITING WITH YOUR DAUGHTER, COMING TRUE. I'M MOVED TO TEARS.

No. TWO

YOU'VE RECOVERED THE MEMORIES FROM THE TIME YOU WERE AT THE HEIGHT OF YOUR CHARMS. GOOD FOR YOU.



WHAT ABOUT "ME"?

AND SO?

THERE'S STILL ONE MORE BLANK TO FILL ON THIS EXAM.

WHAT IS "MY NAME" ...?



"I'M SORRY ...

"... ANN."



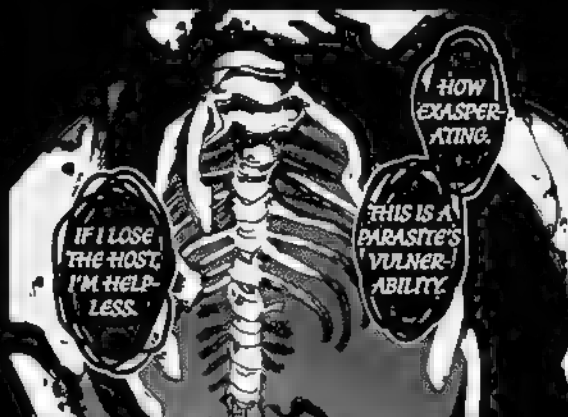
C'MON! TELL ME!

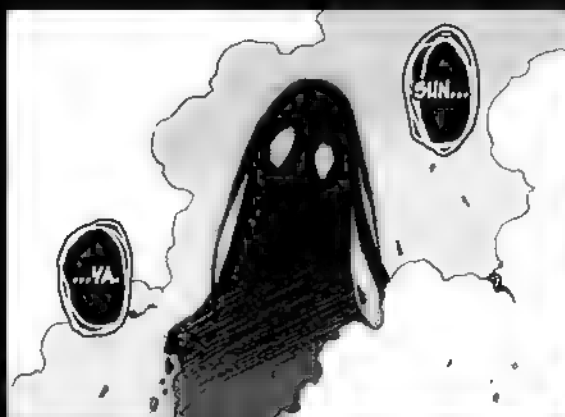
"WHO" AM I ???

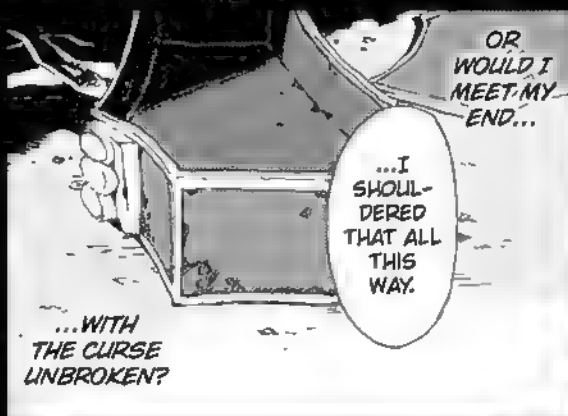


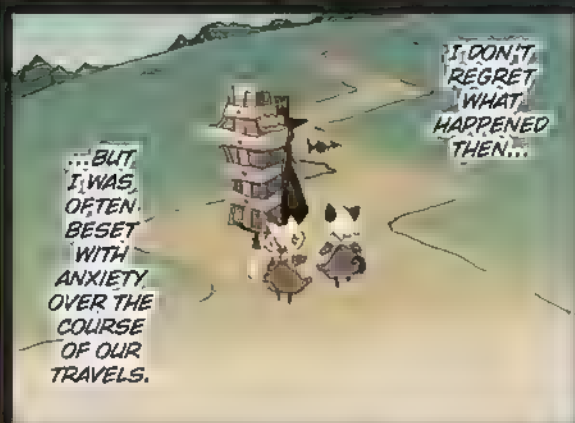






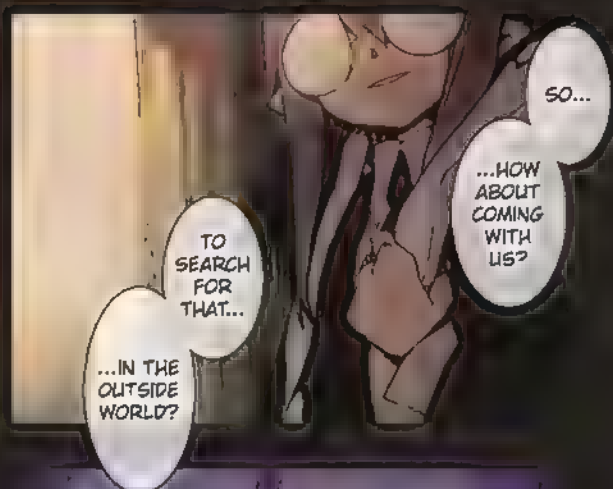






...BUT
I WAS
OFTEN
BESET
WITH
ANXIETY
OVER THE
COURSE
OF OUR
TRAVELS.

I DON'T
REGRET
WHAT
HAPPENED
THEN...



SO...

...HOW
ABOUT
COMING
WITH US?

TO
SEARCH
FOR
THAT...

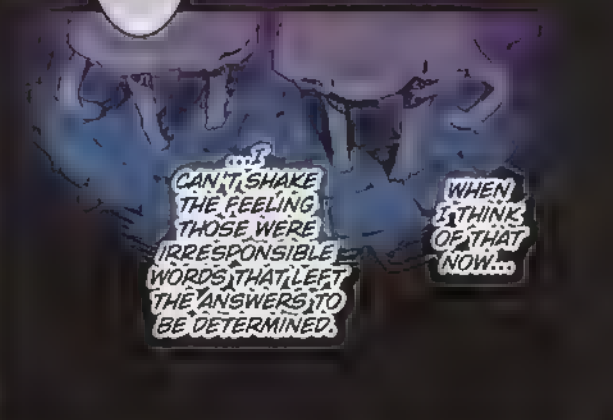
...IN THE
OUTSIDE
WORLD?



"SHOULD
I HAVE..."

"IS
THIS THE
'WRONG
'PATH'?"

"...BROUGHT
THOSE TWO
WITH US?"



...I
CAN'T SHAKE
THE FEELING
THOSE WERE
IRRESPONSIBLE
WORDS THAT LEFT
THE ANSWERS TO
BE DETERMINED.

WHEN
I THINK
OF THAT
NOW...



TELL
ME...

...NIJIKU,
SANJU.

WAS IT
REALLY...

...A GOOD
THING YOU
MET US?



EVEN
IF I AM
PREPARED
TO SEE YOU
ON YOUR
DEATHBED

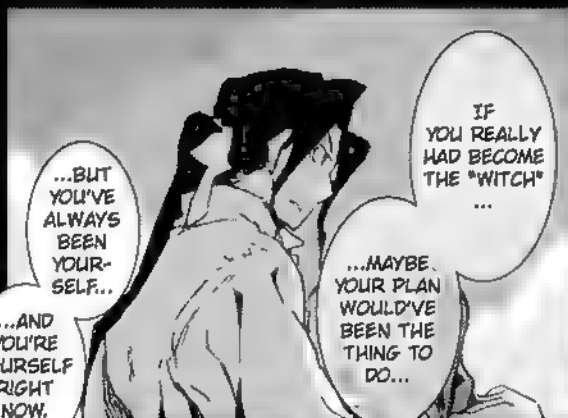
...I
DON'T
HAVE WHAT
IT TAKES
TO JUST
LET YOU
DIE.

I NEVER
AGREED
TO THAT.



SEN-
SEI...

YOU
DO RE-
MEMBER
YOUR
PROMISE,
DON'T YOU?



...BUT
YOU'VE
ALWAYS
BEEN
YOUR-
SELF...

IF
YOU REALLY
HAD BECOME
THE "WITCH"

...MAYBE
YOUR PLAN
WOULD'VE
BEEN THE
THING TO
DO...

...AND
YOU'RE
YOURSELF
RIGHT
NOW.



"IF
THAT
BLACK
STUFF
...
TAKES
ME OVER
ENTIRELY
..."

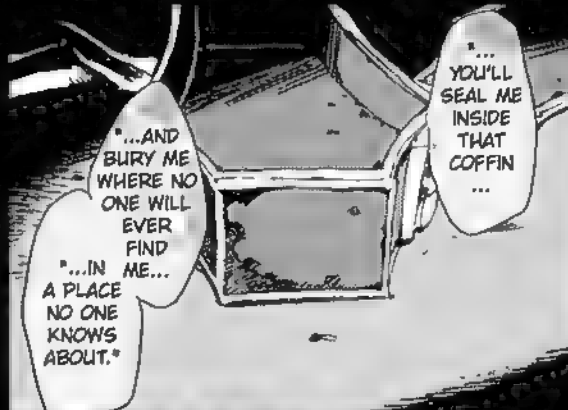
"...AND
I STOP
BEING
MYSELF
..."



I GET
MOST
THINGS
WITHOUT
YOU HAVING
TO SAY A
WORD.

AND
THAT ALSO
GOES FOR
WHETHER
OR NOT
YOU TRULY
WANT ME TO
KEEP MY
PROMISE.

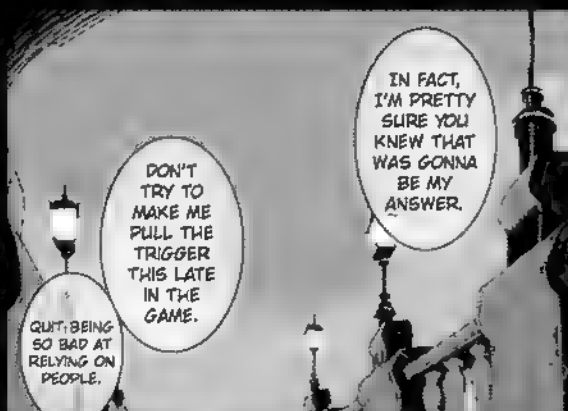
WE'VE
WALKED
ALL THIS
WAY TO-
GETHER



"...AND
BURY ME
WHERE NO
ONE WILL
EVER
FIND
ME..."

"...IN
A PLACE
NO ONE
KNOWS
ABOUT."

"...
YOU'LL
SEAL ME
INSIDE
THAT
COFFIN
..."



IN FACT,
I'M PRETTY
SURE YOU
KNEW THAT
WAS GONNA
BE MY
ANSWER.

DON'T
TRY TO
MAKE ME
PULL THE
TRIGGER
THIS LATE
IN THE
GAME.

QUIT BEING
SO BAD AT
RELYING ON
PEOPLE.



FORGET
IT.







NO.

I WON'T DO IT.



DON'T TOUCH ME.

DON'T COME NEAR ME.

THIS ISN'T WHY...

...I BROUGHT YOU TWO ALONG WITH US.

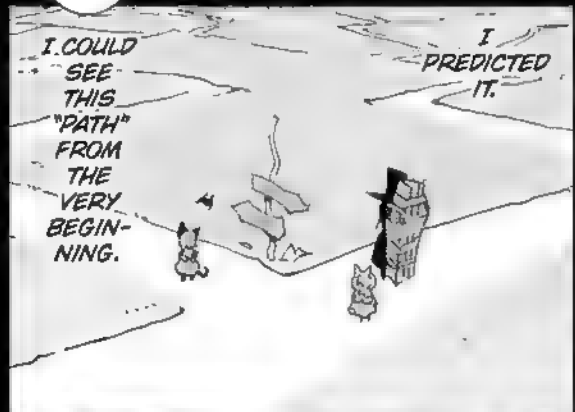


I...

...THIS WOULD HAPPEN EVENTUALLY.

I FIGURED...

...CAN'T DO THAT.



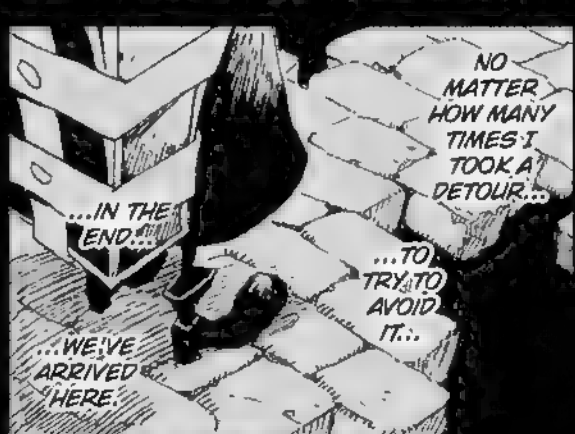
I COULD SEE THIS "PATH" FROM THE VERY BEGINNING.

I PREDICTED IT.



STOP IT...

...NIJUKU, SANJU.



NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES I TOOK A DETOUR...

...IN THE END...

...TO TRY TO AVOID IT...

...WE'VE ARRIVED HERE.



I CAN'T GIVE THIS TO YOU.

IT'S SOMETHING ...

...I MUST NEVER PASS ON.



...FROM THE DAY WE FIRST MET...

AS IF THIS WERE INEVITABLE...



IT HURTS SO BAD, YOU CAN'T EVEN MOVE, RIGHT?

...THAT IT'S HEAVY AND HURTS YOU.

BUT NOW, THERE'S SO MUCH OF IT...



...CAN'T WALK UNLESS THEY'RE LIGHT ON THEIR FEET.

...THAT TRAVELERS...

SEN, YOU AND KURO-CHA OFTEN SAID...



WE KNOW SOMETHING...

...BUT YOU DON'T?

YOU'RE BEING WEIRD, KURO-CHAN.

IT'S LIKE ALWAYS BUT BACK-WARD.



THESE BLACK SPOTS ARE YOU TOO, KURO-CHA.

THEY'RE MADE OUT OF YOU.

THIS ISN'T A BAD THING.



SO WE'LL CARRY IT FOR YOU.



WE KNOW...

...WHAT'S INSIDE IT.



...FROM YOUR JOURNEY TOO, KURO-CHA.

WE'LL CARRY THE "BAGGAGE" ...



IT'S FULL...

...YOU'VE GONE THROUGH ON YOUR TRAVELS.

...OF ALL THE HAPPY THINGS, AND SAD THINGS, AND MANY OTHER THINGS...

...AND
SWITCH
PLACES.

FRAGMENTS
OF WHITE AND
BLACK MELD
TOGETHER...

BRIGHT-
NESS AND
DARKNESS
BECOME
WARPED.

MY
FIELD OF
VISION
MELTS
AWAY.

...AND
MAKE US
DISAPPEAR.

...WILL
MIX IN
WITH
US...

KURO-
CHAN,
WE ALSO
KNOW...

...YOU'RE
REALLY
SCARED
THE BLACK
STUFF...

ARE THOSE
SHADOWS
SCATTERED
WITHIN THE
LIGHT?

WHICH
WORLD IS
THIS?

WHAT
AM I
SEEING
NOW?

...WE'LL
BE FINE!

BUT...

THE
BLACK
STUFF
DOESN'T
BOTHR
US.

...LIGHTS!
ILLUMINATING
THE DARKNESS?

OR...

THIS
LIGHT...

I FEEL
LIKE I'VE
SEEN IT
SOME-
WHERE
BEFORE...

BOTH
ARE
THERE.

IT'S
BOTH,
KURO-
CHAN.

...CAN
BECOME
SOMETHING
THAT'S
NOT.

EVEN
SOME-
THING
THAT'S
PITCH-
BLACK...



KURO-
CHAN,
YOU
TOOK
US...

...FROM
A DARK
PLACE...



...TO A
BRIGHT
ONE.



SO
WE'RE
GOING
TO...



...SHINE
FOR YOU,
KURO-
CHAN...

...SO
YOU DON'T
LOSE YOUR
WAY IN THE
DARK.



THERE
ARE RAINY
DAYS AND
CLEAR
DAYS.

IT'S
LIKE
YOUR
JOURNEY,
KURO-
CHA.

FUN
THINGS
AND SAD
THINGS...



KURO-
CHA...

YOU'RE
BOTH
KIND AND
SCARED...



...AND
YOUR
HANDS
...



...COLD
AND
WARM.



THAT WAY...

...WE CAN WALK TOGETHER AGAIN, RIGHT?

IT'S FINALLY ...







WHERE
ARE
WE?

WUHU?

I'M
RIGHT
HERE

HERE

NIJUKU,
WHERE
ARE
YOU?



SO WAIT
FOR US,
OKAY?

SO
DO YOU,
SANJU!

AH-HA-
HA-HA!
NIJUKU,
YOU LOOK
FUNNY!

WE
CAN'T
WALK
LIKE
THIS.

NOPE.

WE CAN'T
WALK THE
SAME PATH
AS KURO-
CHA.

BUT
IT'LL BE
OKAY.

AFTER
ALL,
WE'RE
"TRAVEL-
ERS."

FOR
US AND
KURO-
CHAN
TOO.

ONCE
WE GET
BACK TO
NORMAL...

...WE'LL
GO SEE
KURO-
CHAN.



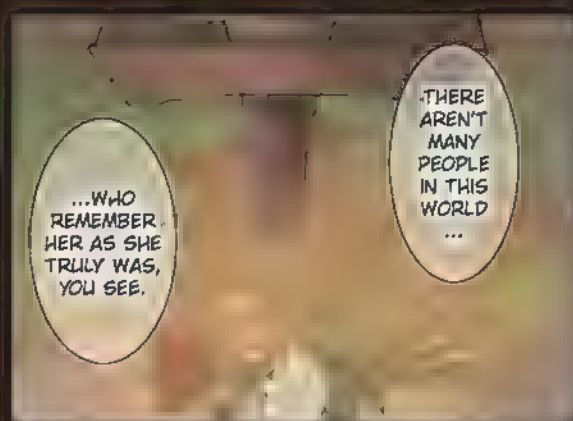
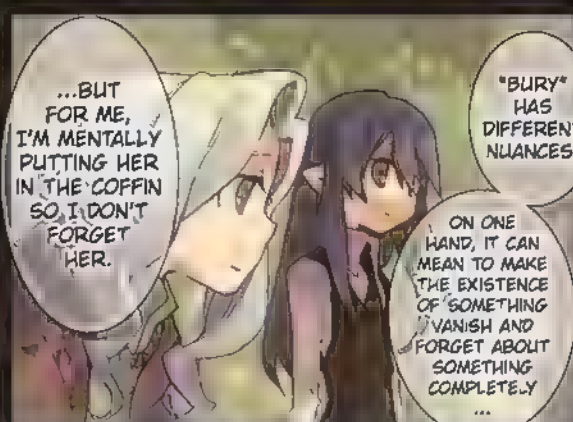
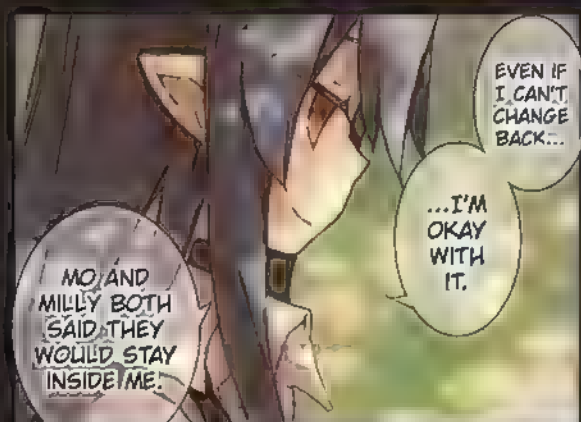
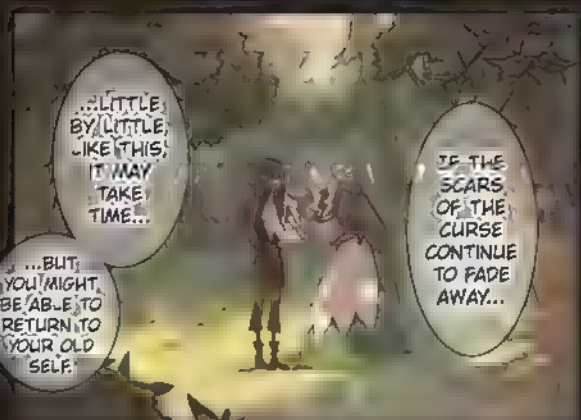
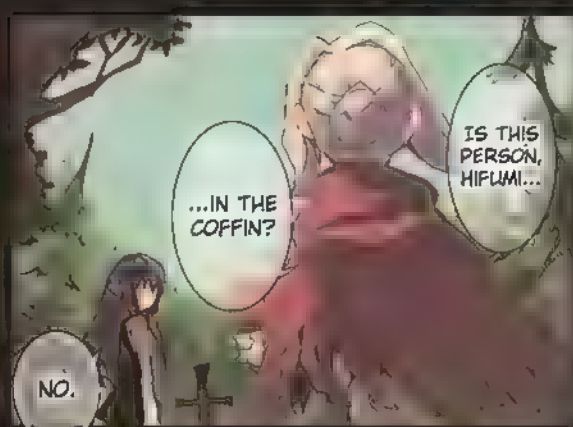
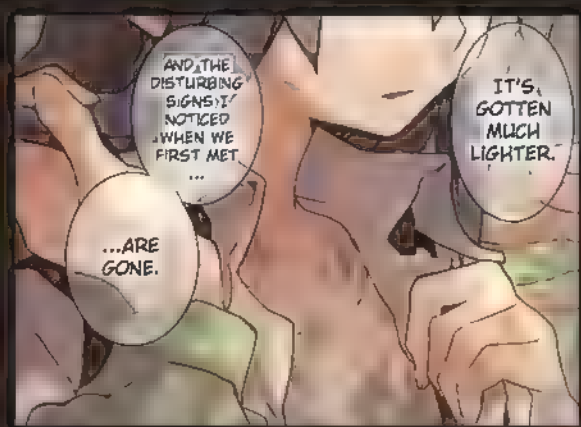




Despite everything, the traveler is sure to be in the middle of her long, long journey even now, somewhere beneath the sky.

And this tale too will be but a short chapter.









.....
OH...
YES. I
KNOW.

I'M
SURE
THOSE
KIDS ARE
ALWAYS
WATCHING
OVER
YOU.

IT'LL
BE
OKAY.
CHEER
UP.



WHERE'VE
THEY
GOTTEN
TO?

THEY
WERE
CALLED
NIJUKU
AND
SANJU,
RIGHT?

THAT
ASIDE,
THOSE
GIRLS
...



HUH!?

AWW,
GEEZ!!
YOU
SHOULDA
SAID SO
BEFORE!

IT SEEMS
LIKE YOU
HAVE THE
WRONG
IDEA HERE,
SO LET ME
SET YOU
STRAIGHT.

THEY'RE
NOT
DEAD.



...THOSE
TWO...

...TO
A LAND
FAR, FAR
AWAY...

...ARE
ON A
DIFFERENT
JOURNEY
...



I MEAN
THIS ONE
HAS SUCH A
ROUNDABOUT
WAY OF
TALKING...

HUH?

BUT
THEN
...

WHEW,
THANK
GOOD-
NESS.
DON'T
SCARE
ME LIKE
THAT.



TO BE
HONEST,
I'D
HOPED
TO GO
WITH
THEM...

...IT WAS
IMPOSSIBLE
FOR ME.

...BUT...



...
WHERE
...

...ARE
THEY?



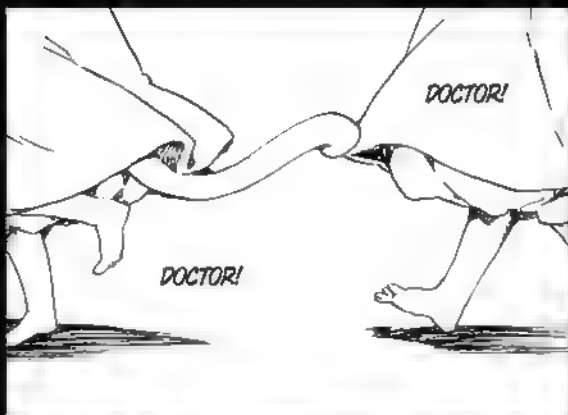
OH...

OH, I
SEE...









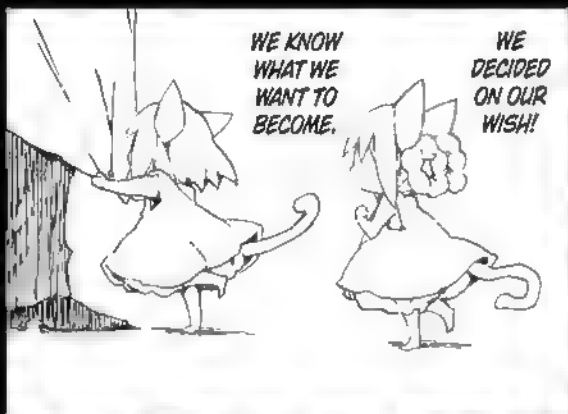
DOCTOR!

DOCTOR!



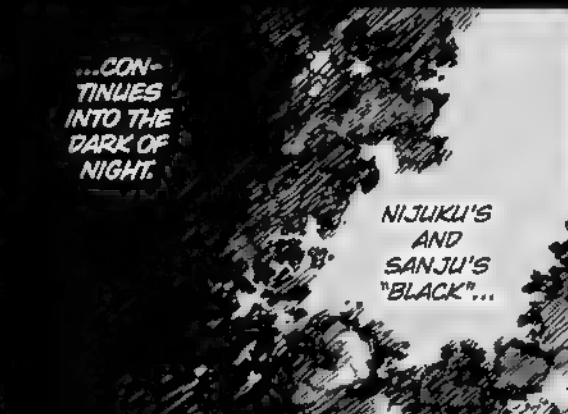
MY
"BLACK"...

...IS
CONNECTED
TO NIJUKU
AND SANJU.



WE KNOW
WHAT WE
WANT TO
BECOME.

WE
DECIDED
ON OUR
WISH!



...CON-
TINES
INTO THE
DARK OF
NIGHT.

NIJUKU'S
AND
SANJU'S
"BLACK"...



THE
GLOWING
THING
THAT'S IN A
DARK DARK
PLACE BUT
DOESN'T
BECOME
DARK
ITSELF...

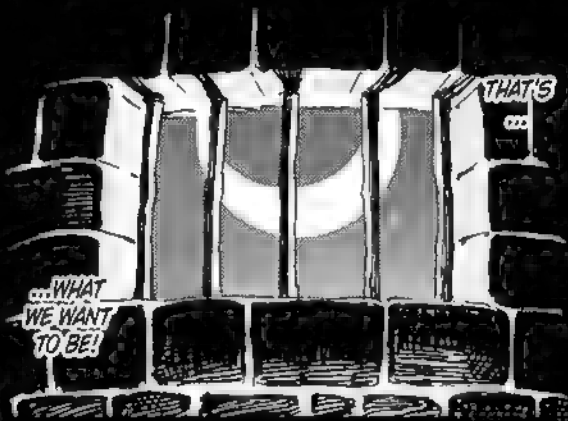
THE
SHINY THING
WE CAN SEE
FROM OUR
ROOM...



...BEGINS.

...THE
NIGHT
WITH
WHICH
THEY
WALK
ARM IN
ARM...

AND
SO...



...WHAT
WE WANT
TO BE!

THAT'S



WHAT IS THAT?



...A DIFFERENT MAN FROM THE ONE WHO CAUSED AN EXPLOSION AND BROUGHT DOWN THE CHURCH BELL?

IS IT...



THERE SEEM TO SUDDENLY BE MORE ADVENTURERS AIMING FOR WHAT LIES BEYOND THE SKY.

HUH... IM-PRES-SIVE.

APPAR-ENTLY, THE AIRSHIP OF A NEW ERA...



LOOK OUT!



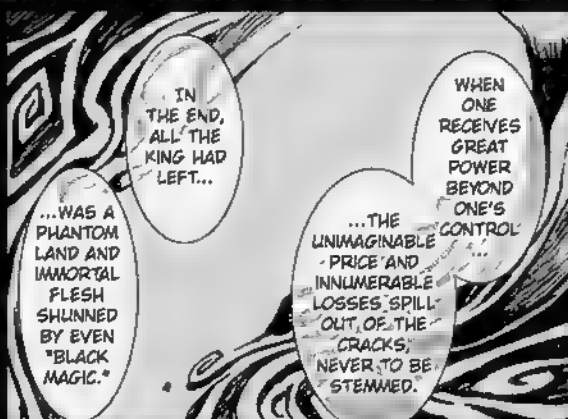
COMING THROUGH ...

ONLY NATU-RAL...

...AFTER WHAT HAPPENED ...

EX-CUSE ME.





IN THE END, ALL THE KING HAD LEFT...

...WAS A PHANTOM LAND AND IMMORTAL FLESH SHUNNED BY EVEN "BLACK MAGIC."

...THE UNIMAGINABLE PRICE AND INNUMERABLE LOSSES SPILLED OUT OF THE CRACKS, NEVER TO BE STEMMED.

WHEN ONE RECEIVES GREAT POWER BEYOND ONE'S CONTROL...



.....
THAT WAS A LONG, LONG TIME AGO.

NOW I'M NO MORE THAN THE LAST DESCENDANT.



I'M NOT A "KING"...

...JUST A "TRAVELER" WHO ONLY LOOKS ON AS HE'S LOST TO THE WINDS.

THAT'S WHY I RETURNED TO BEING A NORMAL, POWERLESS HUMAN.



I TRAVEL BECAUSE "HE" EXISTS.

YOU KNOW ABOUT THE "BLACK ONE," DON'T YOU?

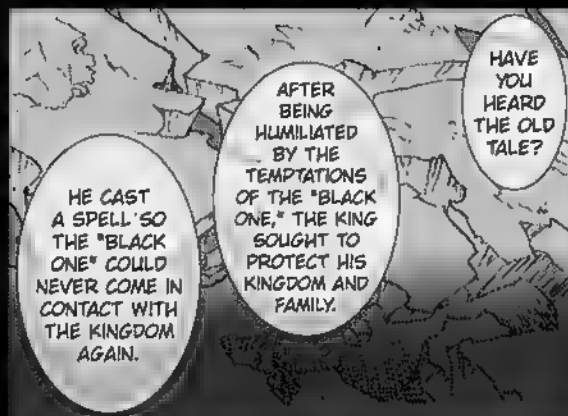
WHY DID YOU BECOME A TRAVELER ...?



I'M NOT ALLOWED ANYMORE.

TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH...

...THAT'S WHY I CAN'T INTERVENE WITH "HIM."



HAVE YOU HEARD THE OLD TALE?

AFTER BEING HUMILIATED BY THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE "BLACK ONE," THE KING SOUGHT TO PROTECT HIS KINGDOM AND FAMILY.

HE CAST A SPELL SO THE "BLACK ONE" COULD NEVER COME IN CONTACT WITH THE KINGDOM AGAIN.



I NOTICED HE HAD PUT A CURSE ON YOU...

I'M SORRY.

...BUT I COULDN'T DO A THING ABOUT IT.

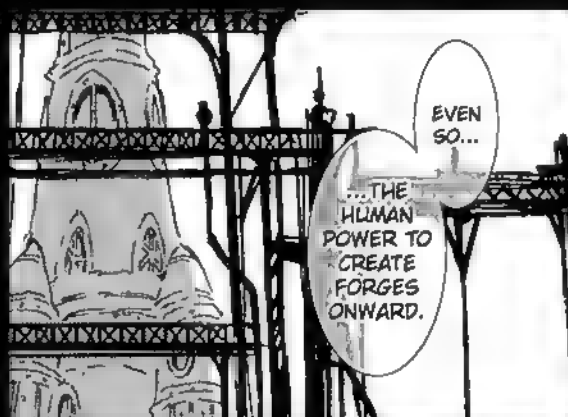
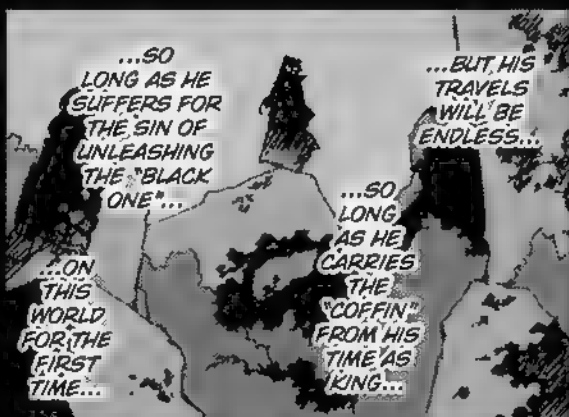


...THE KINGDOM WAS FOREVER CUT OFF FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD.

AS A RESULT ...

FRAGMENTS OF THE "BLACK ONE" WERE SCATTERED ALL OVER.

THE CONTINENT SPLINTERED.







...BE-
WILDERED
PEOPLE ALL
OVER THE
WORLD.

THE
EMERGENCE
OF THESE
TINY TWIN
MOONS...

AT
FIRST, I
THOUGHT I
WAS JUST
DRUNK...



...THE STORY
OF ONE
TRAVELER.

THE STORY
OF A MINOR
JOURNEY...



...BUT
THEY'RE
STILL
THERE.

YEAH,
AND
ALSO...

...THEM
LITTLE
MOONS
DON'T HAVE
A FIXED
ORBIT.



BUT
THAT
SMALL
JOURNEY...

...CHANGED
THE WORLD
EVER SO
SLIGHTLY.



AT THE
BEGINNING,
I THOUGHT
THEY WERE
HIDING BEHIND
THE CLOUDS
...

AND
DON'T THEY
SOMETIMES
DISAPPEAR
ENTIRELY
TOO?

...BUT
THEN THEY
APPEARED IN
THE OPPOSITE
DIRECTION IN
THE WEST-
ERN SKY.



EVER
SINCE
THEN,
RISING
IN THE
NIGHT
SKY...

ONE
THING
IN PAR-
TICULAR
STANDS
OUT.



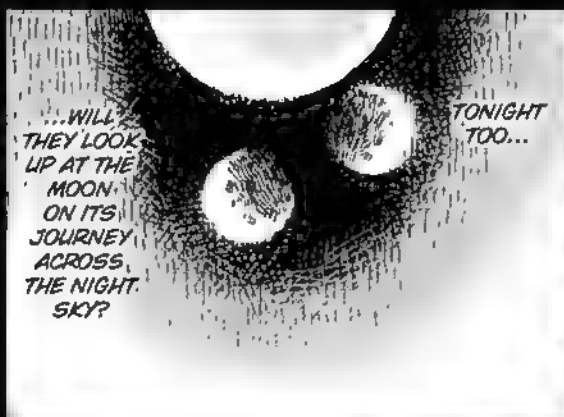
...YOU'RE
LIABLE TO
GET
LOST.

IF
YOU'RE
TRAVELING
AT NIGHT
AND USING
THEM AS
GUIDE-
POSTS...



...NEXT
TO THE
BIG MOON,
THEY
APPEAR
TO BE
WALKING
ALONG
WITH IT.

...ARE
TWO
LITTLE
MOONS...



...WILL
THEY LOOK
UP AT THE
MOON
ON ITS
JOURNEY
ACROSS
THE NIGHT
SKY?

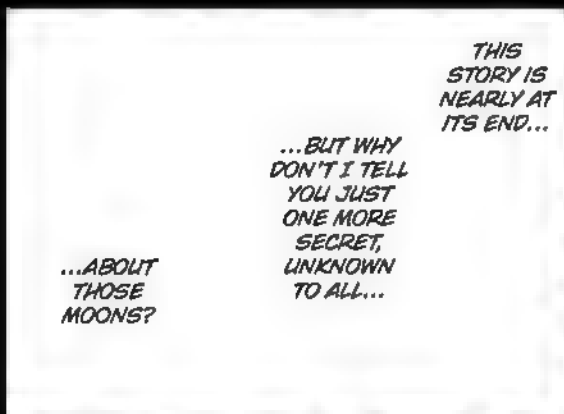
TONIGHT
TOO...



I BET
THOSE
L'L
MOONS
...

WELL,
I GUESS
NOTHIN' SAYS
CELESTIAL
BODIES GOTTA
MOVE IN A
SET WAY.

...ARE
ROOTLESS
WANDERERS
LIKE US.



THIS
STORY IS
NEARLY AT
ITS END...

...BUT WHY
DON'T I TELL
YOU JUST
ONE MORE
SECRET,
UNKNOWN
TO ALL...

...ABOUT
THOSE
MOONS?



IT AIN'T
BAD TO
HAVE ONE
OR TWO
UNINHIB-
ITED...

...
TRAVELING
BODIES IN
THE SKY
ONCE IN A
WHILE.

YEAH,
AND...

ALSO



...THEIR
SHADOW-
LIKE
"BLACK
SPOTS."

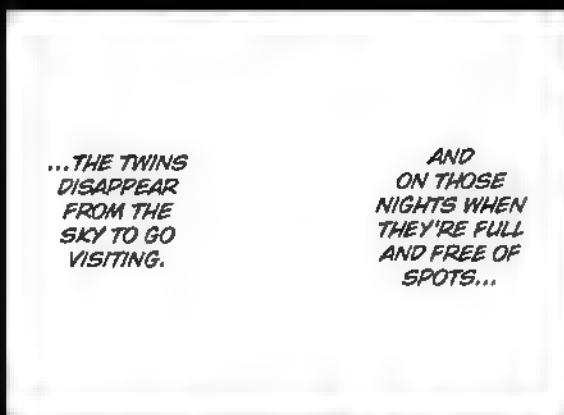
WHEN
WAXING,
THE TWIN
MOONS ARE
MISSING...



...WITH THE
LIGHT FROM
THOSE TWIN
MOONS...

...I FEEL
LIKE THE
NIGHT IS,
LESS LONELY
THAN IT WAS
BEFORE.

DON'T
YOU
THINK?



...THE TWINS
DISAPPEAR
FROM THE
SKY TO GO
VISITING.

AND
ON THOSE
NIGHTS WHEN
THEY'RE FULL
AND FREE OF
SPOTS...



THESE
ARE JUST
A FEW
EXAMPLES
...

...OF THE
VARIOUS
THOUGHTS
PEOPLE
HAVE
ABOUT THE
PHENOM-
ENON.



I'VE
BEEN
WAITING
FOR
YOU.

—HI.



WHO DO
THEY GO
TO SEE?

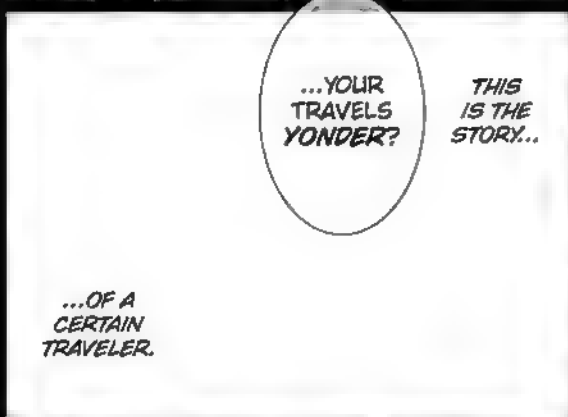
WELL, OF
COURSE—



LET'S
SEE...
TO
START
WITH...



...WON'T
YOU
TELL ME
ABOUT...



...YOUR
TRAVELS
YONDER?

THIS
IS THE
STORY...

...OF A
CERTAIN
TRAVELER.





IT'S
THE STORY
OF A JOURNEY
SO SMALL...

...IT COULD
FIT IN THE
POCKET OF
A FULL
MOON.



THIS IS VOLUME 7 OF *SHOULDER-A-COFFIN KURO*.
FOR NOW, THIS IS THE FINAL VOLUME OF THE STORY.

FOR A SERIES I'VE BEEN WORKING ON FOR ABOUT TEN YEARS,
IT'S A TRIFLING WORK, BUT IF THERE'S ONE THING I ENJOYED,
IT WAS GETTING TO DEPICT "KURO."

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR READING TO THE END.

THERE ARE SEVERAL UNPUBLISHED STORIES I COULDN'T FIT INTO
THE VOLUMES BECAUSE OF PAGE COUNT LIMITS, BUT IT LOOKS LIKE
THESE ADDITIONAL STORIES WILL BE COLLECTED INTO ONE EXTRA
VOLUME. I THINK THESE WILL GIVE YOU A DIFFERENT FLAVOR FROM
THE USUAL TRAVEL STORIES HERE, SO I HOPE YOU'LL PICK IT UP AS
A POST-MEAL DESSERT.

UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN...

SATOKO KIYUDUKI
2018





MEM.
IMMORTAL. ONLY
AREN'T THERE
ANY FACT IN
THERE IS NO
A CURSE IS
DETERMINED
ON 1 1 12

THE END.



THEY
IMPORTANTLY
AREN'T THERE
ANY FACT IN
THERE WITH
A CURSE OF
DEATH IN
THEIR EYES

THE END.



TRANSLATION NOTES

Page 4

The word for fluorite in Japanese is *hotaruishi*, or "firefly stone."

Page 16

29 and 30 can be pronounced *nijuku* and *sanju*, so the twins' experiment numbers became their names.

Page 23

Like Sanju and Nijuku, Hifumi's name ("one, two, three") is derived from her experiment number, 123.

Page 90

Robur is a reference to Jules Verne's antiheroic, genius sky pirate, featured in the novels *Robur the Conqueror* and *Master of the World*.

Page 111

Sunya (phonetically Shuunya in Japanese), Kuro's real name, appears to be derived from the Sanskrit word for the "state of nothingness," which is the ideal Buddhist state of being at one with the cosmos.

Page 144

"...in the pocket of a full moon" is possibly a reference to an antique pocket watch in the style of a full moon. The pocket is the tiny storage space inside the watch when it's opened.

Page 146

The character dialogue in the under-jacket bonus art is a reference to the works of legendary director Hayao Miyazaki. "Ride Yakul!" is specific to his grand fantasy anime *Princess Mononoke*.

Page 146

"Balae" refers to the magic curse word that destroys the eponymous castle in another Miyazaki movie, *Castle in the Sky*.





SHOULDER-A-COFFIN KURO 7

SATOKO KIYUDUKI

Translation: Sheldon Drzka

Lettering: Lys Blakeslee

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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